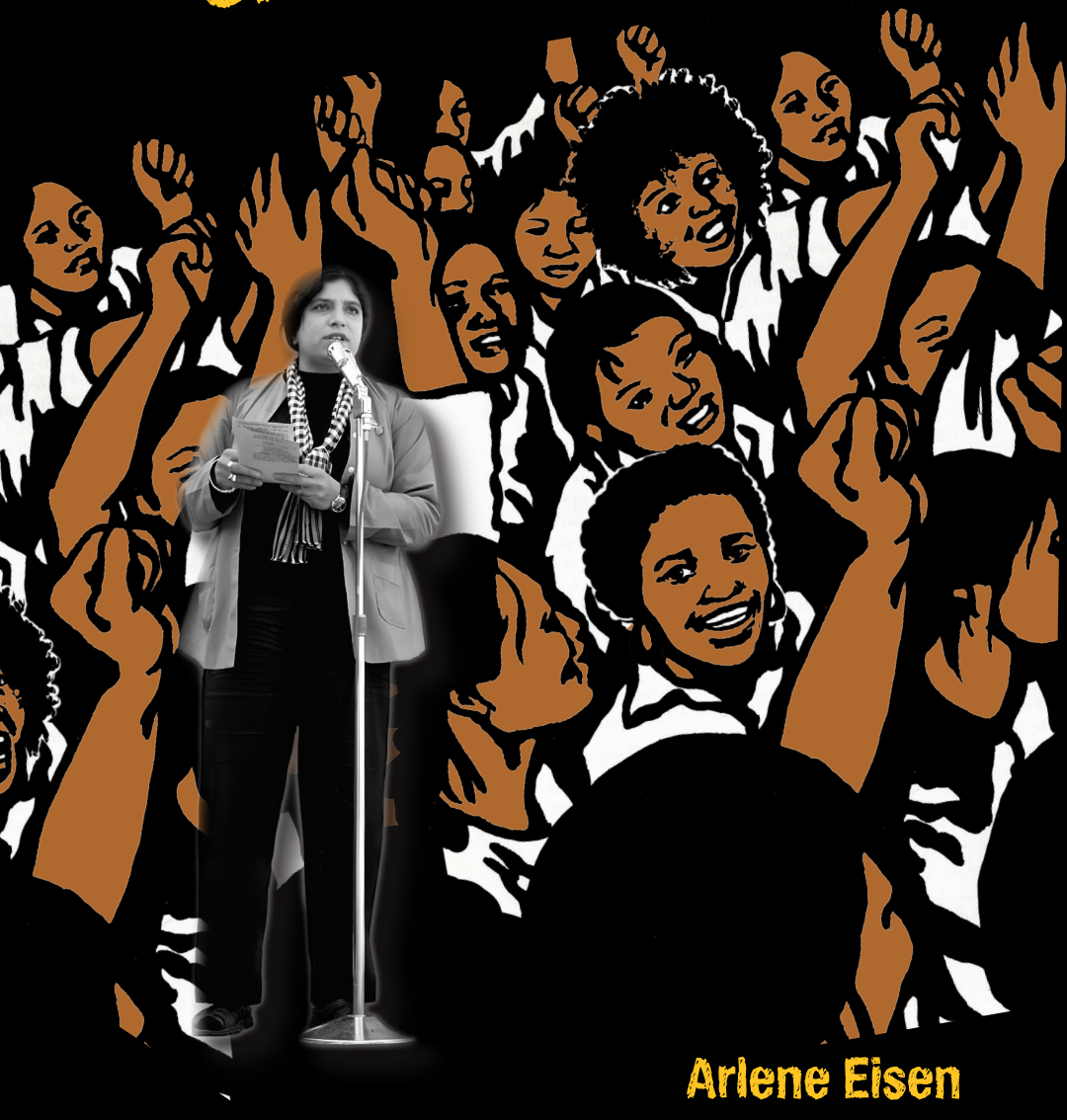
In The Worldwide Family of Militant Women



Arlene Eisen
with foreword by
Nadya Tannous

Iskra Books

Praise for
IN A WORLDWIDE FAMILY OF MILITANT WOMEN

"*In the Worldwide Family of Militant Women* is in the company of political memoirs like *The Wall Between*, *Assata*, and *Outlaw Woman* in not only teaching us how to fight, but inspiring us to do so. Organizers and activists, students and workers, each have something to learn from Arlene Eisen's ideological development, internationalist perspective, steadfast commitment to building the women's liberation and anti-war movements, and fightback against a capitalist racist patriarchal society. This is the political education and radical motivation we sorely need as the choice between socialism and barbarism becomes more acute."

--Charisse Burden-Stelly,
author of *Black Scare/Red Scare: Theorizing Capitalist Racism in the United States*

"Arlene Eisen's earlier work, *Women of Viet Nam*, remains, so many years later, one of my favorite books depicting the ways women's resistance affects the outcome of a struggle for justice. It is both a history and an analysis of how promoting women's full leadership and participation can determine the success of an entire social system. Her new memoir offers an account of the experiences that gave rise to that book and to a lifetime of anti-imperialist action."

--Laura Whitehorn, former US-held political prisoner,
co-founder of Release Aging People in Prison (RAPP Campaign),
editor of *The War Before* by Safiya Bukhari

"Do yourself a favor, get a copy of *In the Worldwide Family of Militant Women*. The historical lessons conveyed in this work are as relevant to movement-building today as they were in the 1960s and '70s. And believe me, the proof, as they say, is in the pudding. Arlene applied and shared many of these lessons with me, and many others, in our joint work in New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina. And then again, in even more depth, in developing *Operation Ghetto Storm* (OGS). Her methodology to collect the data that shaped the analysis in OGS and the mass line she employed to develop the #Every28Hours hashtag were derived from the lessons shared in *Worldwide Family*. So, again pick it up. Read *Worldwide Family of Militant Women*, reflect, incorporate and apply it to your practice."

--Kali Akuno, Executive Director and Co-Founder of Cooperation Jackson,
co-editor of *Jackson Rising Redux*

"*WW Family of Militant Women* is more than memory, it's a living blueprint. In this fierce and unflinching account, Arlene Eisen walks us through blood, protest, and revolution. Rooted in the radical love of women who carried torches before her—Vicki Garvin, Toni Cade Bambara, the Combahee River Collective—this is a fire-lit offering for today's freedom dreamers. Eisen, voice sharpened by decades of resistance and mothering, speaks to our now: climate collapse, rising fascism, state violence, and the unrelenting grip of white supremacist patriarchy. This book is a testimony of the chaos one reckons with, as we attempt to build a new just world.

--Mahogany L. Browne, author/poet-in-residence, Lincoln Center, Founder of Black Girl Magic Ball, author of *Chrome Valley*, A *Bird in the Air Means We Can Still Breathe*, *Woke Baby*

"*In the Worldwide Family of Militant Women* will inspire women in today's political movements through stories from Arlene Eisen's rich herstory of organizing. Full of personal and political reflections, this book provides insights for today's activists into the power of internationalism, solidarity, and the crucial participation of women in the global struggle for liberation."

--Linda Evans, anti-imperialist political prisoner for 16 years; co-founder of All of Us or None, and volunteer with Immigrant Defense Taskforce of North Bay Organizing Project in Santa Rosa

"In the tradition of Sankofa, we ought to look back so we know how to move forward--but this time, we must chart a path with the revolutionary blueprint of women who loved us enough to not become that which was done to us. Arlene Eisen offers us an urgent and necessary testament to the feminist groundwork of our social movements. An approach, a way with and through, to bear witness and participate in the transformative everyday conditions of our lives. This book is a map, a flame, a fresh glass of water for each of us during these ever-trying times on a path toward liberation."

--Aja Monet, surrealist blues poet, author of *My Mother Was A Freedom Fighter* and *Florida Water*

"*In The Worldwide Family of Militant Women* reminds us that we are a global family co-led by militant women. In this memoir, from the 1960s to eighties, Arlene Eisen, a survivor of misogyny, domestic violence, militarism and medical torture, evolves as a skilled writer and organizer and the mother of two sons who became influential artists and writers. *Worldwide* is a deeply personal and revealing memoir that travels through generations to interweave the contributions of brilliant and brave women in Southeast Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East who confronted militarism, CIA, FBI and fascism. This book offers a gift to us, inspiring our international militancy and loving entanglements with women across the globe who seek liberation."

--Joy James, author of *New Bones Abolition* and *Contextualizing Angela Davis*, is the editor of *Beyond Cop Cities* and *Confronting Counterinsurgency*.

"White supremacy is a helluva drug. It is so pervasive and (many times) pernicious. It not only reaffirms the delusions of white people that their worldview, values and experiences are central to everything, it also reinforces that same sickness in the minds of all those who are not white. Fortunately for us, we have reminders that this is a lie. Arlene Eisen's story is an invaluable reminder that there were - and are - people in the present century who have committed their lives to the defeat of not only white supremacy but also its brothers (imperialism, and capitalism's patriarchy). In general, Eisen's story is of one woman's path to commitment to the collective revolutionary struggle. In particular, her experiences with the Vietnamese and Black Liberation struggles during the 60s and 70s provide a much-needed addendum to a history still tainted by omissions and lies. *In The Worldwide Family of Militant Women* is a critical addition to the worldwide story of anti-imperialist revolution that is still being written."

--Thandisizwe Chimurenga, Los Angeles author of *No Doubt: The Murder(s) of Oscar Grant*; *Some of Us Are Brave*: *Interviews and Conversations with Sistas on Life, Art and Struggle*; and host of *Rootwork: Getting Down to the Root*, aired on KPFK and Black Liberation Media.

"*In the Worldwide Family of Militant Women* could not be more timely. As Iran burns and Gaza starves, readers, especially feminists, will take heart and inspiration from Arlene's memoir of love and revolution in the 1960s and '70s. Told with humor and unflinching honesty, this book unearths the history of a multiracial group of North American feminists who built lasting relationships with anti-colonial women organizers in Vietnam, Latin America, Palestine and Iran. I laughed, I cried, and most often, I nodded and said, 'Yes, that's exactly how I feel.'"

--Kate Jessica Raphael, author of *Murder Under the Bridge: A Palestine Mystery*, Producer, *KPFA Women's Magazine*

In the Worldwide Family of Militant Women

In the Worldwide Family of Militant Women

Arlene Eisen

Foreword by Nadya R. Tannous

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Dedicated to victorious reunions of past, present and future members of the worldwide family of militant women; to my sons Biko Eisen-Martin and Tongo Eisen-Martin who both inherited and passed on those family traditions and to my granddaughter, Sankara Xolani Eisen-Martin.

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Foreword

Nadya R. Tannous

It was November 4th, 2023, in Washington DC. As I stood at the emcee's mic on stage, the echo of my voice heard across a sea of nearly one million people crowding into the National Mall filled me with a sense of awesome responsibility. We had organized the largest demonstration of solidarity with the Palestinian people in United States history. Four weeks into the unfolding United States/Israeli genocide against the Palestinian people, it was clear to the organizers that the Zionists would make this assault on Gaza deadlier than any other before it. Yet at that time, we did not imagine that we were witnessing the early stages of a twenty-first century campaign of extermination that would challenge humanity itself.

Nevertheless, before and since October 2023, spanning 100 years of settler colonialism and Palestinian resistance, Palestinian organizers in the diaspora always affirm the certainty of eventual victory. Our confidence has its roots in our peoples' unshakeable tradition of revolutionary struggle; commitment to remaining in and to returning to the land of Palestine; and to our clarity that our national liberation is integral to a worldwide victory over an increasingly desperate imperialism. At heroic sacrifice, the Palestinian, Lebanese, Yemeni and Iraqi people have exposed both the barbarism and vulnerability of the Zionist Project and its US imperial sponsors.

These are critical times that are bound to change the trajectory of history. We are at an epoch-defining turning point of unprecedented technological potential both to destroy and to build; when climate catastrophe, accelerated by war, threatens all life. Still, although the pathway to liberation is littered with obstacles that seem to have no immedi-

ate solutions, we gather as much insight and inspiration as we can from veterans of the Palestinian Liberation movement, veterans from other national liberation struggles and from the solidarity movements that came before us.

I enthusiastically agreed to write the Foreword to Arlene's book, set in an earlier epoch-defining turning point in history, because hers is a narrative of veterans that have so much to teach. She is an internationalist, and a militant in the anti-imperialist women's movement, a movement that has been too-often overlooked. Despite innumerable distractions, these organizers all persevered, fueled by the conviction that the combined struggles of the peoples of Africa, Asia and Latin America would eventually defeat their main enemy: the imperialist system.

In the following chapters, the author's encounters with members of the worldwide family of militant women offer solid guideposts for navigating these difficult times. Arlene recreates her conversations and experiences with long distance revolutionaries as diverse as Kathleen Cleaver, Toni Cade Bambara, Vicki Garvin, Meridel LeSueur, Sonia of the underground "MR-8" in Brazil, and General Nguyen Thi Dinh (the woman who led the Vietnamese guerrillas against the US occupation of southern Viet Nam). Their practical and political accounts of surviving life-threatening state assassination attempts, torture, imprisonment, exile, round-the-clock surveillance, intimidation, infiltration, bribery, beatings, and economic banning are both inspiring and useful.

Arlene writes honestly and concretely, often exposing her own vulnerability, to show her readers how she integrated what she learned from this family of militant women with her own experience. During the 1960s and 1970s, like today, the US Empire was at war with Black and Brown people inside the US and worldwide. From their accumulated experience with the US Empire, and with their confrontations with white supremacist and patriarchal institutions in various forms, these militant women developed their particular anti-imperialist women's political analysis, organizations, and movements.

For example, while the Black Panther women joined with all Party members to defend their communities against white supremacist police, they led political education classes explaining how their communities

were domestic colonies oppressed like the colonies and neo-colonies in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. They consistently stood in solidarity with the Vietnamese and other liberation fighters against imperialism. Some Panther women, like Assata Shakur, also explicitly challenged patriarchy, recognizing how challenging patriarchy both inside the Party and in its institutionalized societal forms, would strengthen their struggles against imperialism and white supremacy.

Arlene became one of the spokespeople for the anti-imperialist women's movement that was committed to direct action to stop the war machine as well as to mass education to bring more women into their movement. She and her comrades were first inspired to become activists as supporters of the Black Liberation Movement, the Anti-Viet Nam War Movement, and/or their own confrontations with patriarchy. They broadened their movement by showing how, for example, the mass rape of Vietnamese women by US troops was unwritten Pentagon policy. This policy demonstrated how the imperialist project was strengthened by the age-old patriarchal practice of rape which terrorized and demoralized the Vietnamese people. At the same time, the US Military motivated and trained its drafted soldiers "to prove their (white) manhood" by raping and otherwise terrorizing the Vietnamese people who were invariably depicted in white supremacist terms.

The relevance of this analysis to the systematic Zionist assaults on the Palestinian people's dignity is stark. Rasmea Odeh, a Palestinian hero in the movement for liberation, is a case in point. Her defiance exposed how the Zionist Occupation Forces tried to manipulate the patriarchal principle—"the daughter's body is the vessel for guarding a family's honor"—to undermine her resistance and her ties to her community. Her Zionist captors, after days of torturing her, forced Rasmea's father to witness his daughter's agony and then threatened to inflict further humiliating torture on the father and daughter together. This was ultimately the tactic that forced Rasmea to falsely confess to a bombing campaign at a theater in Jerusalem.

When Rasmea's sister visited her in her hospital bed after the forced confession, she famously asked Rasmea "did they take your honor"? To which Rasmea responded, "No. My honor is not my body, my honor is my homeland." Later, by publicly sharing an account of her ordeal, Ras-

mea became a model for breaking through the silence, shame and isolation built from the toxic mix of patriarchy and Zionism. She thereby neutralized the power of Israeli soldiers to sabotage her dignity, her family's honor, and her community's morale.

Today, corporate media, corporate funders and most of academia give liberal feminism center stage. They promote a feminism that demands more "representation" at the seats of established power and privilege. Even when "intersectional feminism" is mentioned, the relationship between "racism, sexism and class oppression" is rarely examined, and, imperialism is invariably ignored. More insidiously, promoters of liberal feminism, link "women's rights" with the interests of Empire. As a result, they actively support military invasion, occupation, and blatant lies designed to justify atrocities. Learning from, adapting, and expanding the anti-imperialist women's movement portrayed in this book becomes increasingly urgent.

Like so many of us raised inside the Empire, Arlene gained her revolutionary understandings only as a hopeful young adult when she hit the Empire's oppressive walls. As she traces her growing understandings of imperialism, white supremacy, and patriarchy, she prompts the reader to consider their own. A collection of indelible manifestations of imperialism punctuate my own memory growing up as an Arab woman in the United States in the post-9/11 era. My peers and I, and many of you, will easily recall non-stop war-hawk speeches, flag displays and slogans that aimed to manufacture consent for the invasions to kill people like us in Afghanistan and Iraq; for murderous sanctions and for the criminalization of all Arabs and Muslims. They claimed invasion would "bring democracy and human rights" to the Muslim world and "save the women" from their own society and men.

Post 9/11, it was common practice for teachers to pull children out of class and interrogate us and/or our mothers about whether our fathers were beating us at home. In fact, they had no regard for the trauma they inflicted on children, families, and the entire community. The portrayal of Arab and/or Muslim men as uncivilized beasts drew seamlessly on the same type of white supremacist patriarchal myths that pervaded the US slavocracy and served to fuel and "justify" the reign of anti-Black terror that lynched thousands of Black people after Reconstruction.

Indeed, the War on Terror politicized my entire generation forcing us to grapple with US imperialism and the criminalization of those who spoke against it. From its beginnings in the genocide of the indigenous people of the continent, to building the economy on the backs of African enslaved labor and Jim Crow super exploitation, the United States has always been a police state. Guantanamo was built on this heritage of murder, kidnapping, rendition, deputization of white civilians and all the other tactics perfected by the US police state. For me as a young person, the launch of the 2001 "war on terror" that grabbed our parents on their way to work or simply as they walked down the street, suddenly upended my life. That ordeal forged an unbreakable link that connected me to the people organizing for justice outside of the United States and to the radical tradition of resistance inside the Empire.

Since October 2023, the corporate media have echoed US politicians of both parties in resurrecting and amplifying their time-tested chorus claiming Palestinian men are bestial rapists and savage beheaders of children. Once again, war and criminalization of all those who oppose imperialist campaigns became the order of the day. Criminalization greases the wheels of fascism. As early as World War II, the brilliant anti-colonial thinker, Aime Cesaire, warned, "Fascism is the application of colonialism to Europe."

In the US, the fascist tradition is manifest in sweeping extra-legal repression against the Pro-Palestine and Palestinian-led movement and is expanding to anyone who the US Empire sees as a threat to its project of world domination. We remember the kidnapping of a lead-negotiator on the side of the pro-Palestinian student movement at Columbia University, Mahmoud Khalil. From the lobby of his apartment complex into the bowels of the out-of-control detention and deportation system, they used methods of rendition developed during the imperialist war against Afghanistan. We remember next that, after a brief family visit in Lebanon when she attempted to return to her job as a specialized surgeon at Brown University's Hospital, the US barred Dr. Rasha Alawieh's re-entry into the country. We remember how Momodou Taal, an anti-imperialist graduate student and leading voice in solidarity with national liberation struggles globally, sued Trump for gross violation of human rights. Then ICE agents revoked his visa and laid siege to his home at Cornell Univer-

sity, pressing Taal to "self-deport." Within weeks, ICE revoked the visas of hundreds of international students and Trump added $48 billion to the budget to finance expansion of the Empire's mass detention and deportation machinery.

In this period, while the police state aims its initial fire at "deportables," it will, no doubt escalate its perennial low-intensity war against Black people, Indigenous Peoples, Muslims, and all others who threaten their absolute power. Those who challenge the traditional patriarchal hierarchy so cherished by white Christian nationalists, are also targets. The Palestinian struggle and the US attempt to destroy it have exposed the United States as a dangerous, dying beast, rife with contradictions. With no pretense at liberal democracy, the erasure of constitutional "checks and balances," the remaining power of the three branches of government is now being mobilized to save the weakened Empire from the snowballing challenges to its hegemony.

Meeting and learning from other members of the worldwide family of militant women in Arlene's book, has strengthened my understanding of the relationship between imperialism and other systems of oppression. While imperialism is the primary contradiction or main enemy of the Palestinian people, imperialism also builds on the foundations of the pre-existing systems of oppression: white supremacy and patriarchy. Anti-imperialist women worldwide have demonstrated that struggles against imperialism open possibilities to strengthen campaigns against white supremacy and patriarchy. Similarly, struggles that target white supremacy and patriarchy may also weaken imperialism. In her concrete elaboration of these relationships during the Viet Nam War era, Arlene's book points to an important path towards expanding and strengthening solidarity with today's movement for the liberation of Palestine.

Arlene Eisen's "worldwide family of militant women," embraced the slogan, "their (Vietnamese) victory is our victory." That slogan is a clear reminder that someone fighting on the front lines in Palestine or Sudan or Cuba today is also struggling for other oppressed people. For organizers at any stage in your journey and in any moment of history, this book is also for you.

Arlene's conversation with a leader of the Viet Nam Women's Union, Tuyen, as they travelled through the barren moonscape left by US bombs over Viet Nam, should be required reading for any discouraged organizer today. Arlene expressed remorse to Tuyen that the US anti-war movement did not do more to stop the destruction they were witnessing in real time. Tuyen answered, "Ahleen, don't despair. It's not your fault. You and your friends have worked your hardest to stop the war. The destruction would have been a lot worse without your movement...You did your best. You know our enemy is your enemy and he is very strong. You will have many more chances to fight. Just don't give up....

Please remember, the peoples' victory is certain, even though it will never come soon enough."

Nadya R. Tannous
A long-time organizer with the Palestinian Youth Movement
April 1, 2025

Author's Introduction

An Invitation

Greetings and welcome. You give me the greatest honor and responsibility by joining me in this exploration. This book excavates the forgotten remains of the anti-imperialist women's movement primarily by unearthing my own political roots and growth, from the early 1960s thru the early 1980s.

I dig with a purpose: that is to engage readers from younger generations who must tear down an even more imposing, deeply entrenched wall that threatens the very existence of all humanity. I invite you to join me in excavating your own possibilities for building a well-organized, supportive, and powerful anti-imperialist women's movement. I especially aim to speak with those who, outraged by the impunity of the powerful, might have joined the 2017 Women's March or the 2020 George Floyd Uprisings; and those who have been traumatized by how Covid has taken nearly 7 million lives because of system failure and the pathological individualism pervading this dying Empire. And most urgent: to those of us who have been horrified and outraged by the US-sponsored genocide of the Palestinian people and feel impelled to challenge the same intolerable war machine that some of us confronted in the 1960s. We need to talk.

The narrative begins in 1961: when Freedom Riders risked their lives to defy Jim Crow—which was still the Law of the Land. It was the year the colonial powers, including the US, joined forces to sponsor the assassination of the first President of independent Congo: Patrice Lumumba. In 1961, the CIA organized the Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba, only two years after the revolution came to power. At that time, all abortions were still illegal in all states and birth control pills (and only at dangerous

dosages) had been available for a few months. Most sectors of the labor market and elite schools legally barred women. There were no mobile phones, not even answering machines; no computers, not even electric typewriters; no internet and public discourse recognized only the terms "mankind" and the pronoun "he."

My personal story opens that same year with a scene many women may identify with: in a seedy hotel, making love for the first time, without pleasure, and hemorrhaging. In that scene, and in scenes that follow—meeting union organizers in the Peruvian Sierra; surviving as an inmate in a psychiatric hospital; presiding over an early meeting of Students for a Democratic Society(SDS); meeting Malcolm X, attempting to block troop trains carrying US recruits to Viet Nam or climbing to a teacher-training college in the Cuban Sierra Maestra—my consciousness and commitments emerge sometimes in defiance, sometimes in tune with the times. The next two decades were a pivotal time in US and world history, when the Black Liberation Movement joined national liberation struggles around the world, and especially in Viet Nam, to fight for independence and freedom against the Empire. Those were the days when our anti-imperialist women's movement embraced the slogan, "Their victory is our victory."

In 2025, from a perspective honed as a committed veteran of decades of struggle against the US Empire; as an educator and lifetime learner; and as a mother still learning from my sons who are committed to the Black Liberation Movement, I have curated stories from my experience that shed light on the issues and preoccupations of people today:

- Looming climate catastrophe and sixth extinction under capitalism

- Enduring, all-encompassing violence and inhumanity of white supremacist institutions

- Perpetual war abroad and militarization at home

- Glaring evidence that we cannot rely on the electoral system or courts to defend anyone's democratic rights or to ensure justice

- The persistent and growing undertow of fascism

- The alarming growth of patriarchal power that mandates compul-

sory breeding and obedience for cis women and insists on the erasure of LGBTQIA+ and all gender-nonconforming people.

These crises facing humanity call for an understanding of women's oppression that challenges strategies that set their sights only on representation, individual empowerment and equal opportunity to advance within the Empire. Anti-imperialist feminists understand that a seat at the Empire's table always stands on the base of white supremacy, profit, and patriarchy. If we are to survive and thrive, the task of nurturing a revolutionary vision and organization across generations remains daunting, but imperative.

For generations, a long line of brilliant women revolutionaries has attempted to light a path for all people's liberation and especially for women. Vicki Garvin, Toni Cade Bambara, Kathleen Cleaver, Roberta Alexander, Melba Maldonado, Fran Beal, Pat Parker, and the Combahee River Collective personally and directly shared their insights with me. This book also features the political wisdom that the Cuban hero, Haydée Santamaria, sisters, and comrades from the Viet Nam Women's Union and from survivors of Latin American dictatorships shared with me. Also, I had the great joyful privilege of learning from Meridel LeSueur, communist, feminist, best-selling writer, and veteran of nearly a century of working-class struggles.

At times, I bring to light my personal motivations, traumas, internal conflicts, scars and fears. My intent, however, is hardly to write a sensationalist, "tell-all" tale. In these accounts, I deliberately give you access to my own vulnerabilities along with the uneven steps I often took to join and build a movement despite those challenges. I hope this self-disclosure will encourage you to confront whatever obstacles you may face to making a full commitment to a revolutionary life. Our secrets, shame and isolation; self-imposed silencing and external censorship, undermine, even prevent, us from finding support and collective solutions to problems rooted in the power of white supremacy and patriarchy.

Fueling the Fire

When he was still in high school, Biko Eisen-Martin, my son, emotionally-literate-beyond-his-years, then two-time winner of the National Teen

Poetry Slam, declared, "You are like Abraham, you started a whole new type of family." At that time, with those words, Biko started me thinking that I had a story that others might want to read. A few years later, Biko, by then a professional actor, launched a serious intra-family campaign for me to write my history. My older son, Tongo Eisen-Martin, the 8th Poet Laureate of San Francisco and political educator/cadre, joined the fray. He insisted that I needed to share my story with a wider audience than those who could fit around our kitchen table.

I resisted. I thought of myself as a revolutionary. I am also a journalist, dedicated to writing about movements and events that might change the world. Writing about myself seemed self-indulgent. Despite my misgivings, another provocation wore down my reticence: the frustration I invariably feel when I hear references to the "women's movement" of the late 1960s and 1970s. They almost always conflate "the women's movement" with the white women's movement and ignore the vibrant movements of Black, Brown, and Asian women both inside and outside the US. In addition, the overarching consensus has been that the white women's movement of the 1960s, and 1970s only cared about sexism and defending white women's right to equal access to the privileges bourgeois white men take for granted.

More recently, Barbara Smith—co-author/founder of the ground-breaking Combahee River Collective and one of the pioneers in Black Women's Studies, advised Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, *"(Women's unions) would be fertile ground for you to do some research on.... these are politics that you would undoubtedly identify with (socialist feminism) and yet here's a chapter of that history that you don't know .... Unlike other feminists, they were best aligned with the work of Combahee."*[1]

During that conversation, Smith did not mention that socialist feminism incorporated a spectrum of politics. Democratic socialists, primarily concerned with domestic issues, crowded one end of the spectrum. Revolutionary anti-imperialists who linked women's liberation to Third World Liberation Struggles (both within and outside the US), gathered at the other end. While socialist feminism remains in the shadows, anti-imperialist feminism was buried without a headstone.

1 Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor ed., *How We Get Free: Black Feminism and the Combahee River Collective* (Haymarket Books, 2017), p. 42.

This erasure has continued despite revival of interest in Third World Women's Movements which were explicitly internationalist and anti-imperialist. *In The Worldwide Family of Militant Women,* seeks to join the conversation, led by Assata Shakur, Barbara Smith, June Jordan, Patricia Romney, Joy James and Angela Davis, in the tradition of former generations of women like Eslanda Roberson, Shirley Graham DuBois, Claudia Jones, Vicki Garvin, Lorraine Hansberry, Nina Simone and many more.

Memory and Names

When I was still in high school, my mother used to brag that I had a photographic memory. Even if that was once true, I lost that miraculous power of recall decades before I decided to write this book. Fortunately, during my many years of higher education, and work as writer, journalist, and educator, I learned to feed my habitual curiosity and skepticism with a steady, overly rich, diet of research, documentation, and recordkeeping.

My work room is bulging with a personal archive of journals, field notes, carbon copies of most of the letters I ever wrote, research notes, research papers and photo albums. My file cabinets are stuffed with clippings, meeting notes, pamphlets, reams of position papers (from before the days of computers) and articles, both published and unpublished. I've also reviewed redacted FBI files available through the Freedom of Information Act. I've drawn on all of this plus the wonders of the internet to make *In the Worldwide Family of Militant Women* as honest and accurate as I am able.

Each individual who you will meet in this book is or was an actual person. I include their last names only if they are known to the public, beyond an immediate circle of friends and comrades. When I was working on early drafts, I used the real names to make it easier for me to recall and maintain contact with the truth of the encounter. Now, many of these people are no longer alive or they are quite old, in situations remote from events that I narrate. Rather than change their names, in most instances, I maintained only their first names. None of the characters in the following pages are composites.

Finally, I need to emphasize that I base my selection, narration, and interpretation of events on the emotional power and political relevance

they have for me. Others, even folks who participated in the same incidents, may remember them differently. In addition, I'd be very surprised if others remembered most of the dialog I present here. I composed nearly all the dialog to represent the substance of the experience, rather than the exact words spoken.

Gratitude

This project began as a three-page sketch I wrote in 2002 during a writing workshop for cancer survivors: "Art for Recovery," led by Cindy Perlis. At the time, of course, I had no plan, or even thought, that after 23 years of sporadic work, a book would emerge. Thank you to Cindy, my fellow cancer survivors and the young writers she invited to facilitate the workshops.

Award-winning playwright, George Birimisa, an intrepid pioneer of gay theater in "Off-Off Broadway," New York, led a writing workshop at the LGBT Center in San Francisco until his death in 2012. When I asked permission to join his weekly gathering of exclusively queer men, he responded immediately, "sure, honey, why not." During four years of weekly meetings, thanks to his insistent demand after I presented my ten new pages, "Go deeper," I learned to write a scene.

Over weekly brunch, I also met regularly with my fellow veterans of anti-imperial women's struggles: Nancy Barrett, Carole Travis, and Anne Weills. Delicious food, raucous reminiscing, and sober re-evaluation of our past together accompanied our weekly reviews of each book chapter. I especially want to express my loving gratitude to Nancy Barrett who passed in February 2021. Her appearances as a character in this book, only scratch the surface of my appreciation of her love, strength and commitment.

More sister/comrades reviewed earlier versions of the completed manuscript and graciously shared their brilliant political and professional insights and encouragement. Kathleen Cleaver, former leader of the Black Panther Party, was central to my political development. Our comradeship grew when she was in exile and deepened when she returned to the States. In later years, as each of us were working on writing down our stories, we sought each others' feedback on our developing manuscripts.

My appreciation for all she taught me is manifest in this book. Renee LeFarge, former editor at *The Movement* newspaper who later became a therapist, graciously offered paragraph by paragraph feedback that helped make my writing as emotionally resonant and honest as possible. I first met Kate Raphael, published novelist, in Ramallah, 2004, where each of us were involved in Palestine solidarity projects. Later, in the Bay Area, our political paths crossed frequently. She generously reviewed the draft of this book when it was several hundred pages longer. I am in her debt for her wisely suggesting that I cut an entire section of the draft on the grounds that "no one cares about your childhood unless you're a celebrity."

I also thank the friends, comrades, writers whose suggestions and encouragement were invaluable along the way. Lincoln Bergman, Terry Bissell, Miranda Bergman, Mahagony Brown, Cathy Cade, Tan Khanh Cao, Thandisizwe Chimurenga, Lotus Fong, Jon Jeter, Sheila Koren, Joyce Lee, Mike Lonergan, Devorah Major, Adam Mansbach, Zenya Prowell, and Rochelle Towers.

I am deeply grateful to my sister/comrade Jane Norling, the internationally-exhibited artist, who also designed and illustrated my first book, *Women of Viet Nam.* She enthusiastically offered her art for the cover of this book. I was thrilled when the brilliant photographer, Cathy Cade, nearly 10 years ago, gifted me with the photograph she had taken of me speaking at an anti-war rally Jan 27, 1975. That photo is now featured on the cover of this book. The experience of working with the brilliant anti-imperialist graphic artist, Lisa Roth, to adapt Cathy and Jane's work to the cover was both enormously productive and fun. With endless patience and good humor, Lisa submitted proof after proof to accommodate my often-inconsistent feedback and suggestions I solicited from others, including artists Miranda Bergman, Terry Foreman, Mike Lonergan, my sons and their comrades.

I owe incomparable gratitude to Dr CBS, aka, Charisse Burden-Stelly, a leading Black Studies Scholar, host of the LSR podcast, prolific writer, and in-demand speaker. I am honored by her generously sharing her time to complete a thorough review of the manuscript both for content and style. Her feedback gave me the confidence to submit the work to a publisher. Finally, by introducing me to the comrades at Iskra Books, she became the essential midwife to the publication of the book.

Róisín Dubh and Henry Hakamäki, editors at Iskra Books, honored me with both their enthusiastic support for the book and their finely honed, professional editorial skills. I learned from their respectful, gracious and painstaking suggestions more than I could have imagined. They were joined by David Peat and others in the Iskra Books Publishing Collective to make this book possible. I am proud to have my book join the widely-respected collection of Iskra Books.

If this writing were audible, I would loudly yell to emphasize my deepest gratitude to Biko Eisen-Martin who gave me timely, thoughtful and persistent "notes" on each of the many drafts. He and his older brother, Tongo, repeatedly encouraged me to persevere each time I was on the brink of giving up the project. Constant conversations and debates with Tongo, "the peoples' poet" over his ideas, questions and experience in building a revolutionary movement led me to make this book more relevant. He fertilized many of the insights you read here. For years, Tongo and Biko have also been my most important teachers and supportive comrades thru my various health crises. Their love, their constancy and inspiration not only nurtured this book, they have sustained my life.

In addition to Biko and Tongo, many women have inspired my political commitment, practice and writing: Meridel Le Sueur, Vietnamese women, particularly Bùi Thị Mè, Vo Thi Thê and General Nguyen Thi Dinh, Brazilian women in exile in Paris, especially Sonia and Norma Bengel, Kathleen Cleaver, Safiya Bukhari and other comrades from the BPP, Kathy Boudin, cherished sister/comrade from our SDS days thru our years as elders, Haydée Santamaría who transformed a scheduled hour interview with me in 1968 to an endless day I could never forgot. I am also continuously inspired by women I know only through their legends: Leila Khaled, Argelia Laya, Graça Machel, Winnie Mandela, Zohra Drif and countless other members of the worldwide family of militant women.

I am most humbled and proud to thank Nadya Tannous, longstanding organizer for the Palestinian Youth Movement, for giving me the highest honor imaginable as a member of the worldwide family of militant women. She took precious time from her round-the-clock commitments to building international solidarity with the leading anti-imperialist struggle of this century to write the foreword to this book.

Finally, thank you, dear reader, for joining me. I look forward to continuing a sisterly exchange of ideas and experiences with anyone interested in the past, present or future of a worldwide family of militant women.

Arlene Eisen,
San Francisco, California
March 8, 2025

Part One:
Escape from New York
(1961-1965)

Blood (1961)

I lay on my back on the lumpy bed in the Hotel Martinique, once a luxury hotel on the edge of Herald Square, near Manhattan's Theater District. The sirens and horns coming from the street some 12 flights below filled the room with muted chaos. The sheets were much scratchier than the ones supplied in my dorm room. The carpet emitted a vague, but unmistakable odor of mold. It blended unevenly with the Pinesol emanating from the bathroom.

I hadn't sipped enough wine to make me drunk, but when I lifted my head, a ripple of nausea rose to the back of my throat. At that point, I was grateful Dieter Strand did not seem interested in kissing me. As he pressed and pushed his knifepoint penis between my legs, probing for an opening, I stared out the window at the dingy stone wall of the neighboring building and watched the shadows of the flashing neon signs. I both did and did not want him to give up. Momentarily, he seemed to have decided that taking my virginity wasn't worth the effort, but he was only catching his breath. When he began pushing again, it was much harder, sharper. Finally, he cut through. And then, after a few thrusts, he grunted loudly and stopped. I kissed him in relief that he had finished.

It was Thanksgiving break from my sophomore year at Cornell, 1961. Since high school, I had looked forward to my "first time"—when I expected that I would share unbounded ecstasy with the man I loved. Now, I felt nothing but pain. Only my fear of interrupting his pleasure had prevented me from stopping the ordeal. As a daughter of the 1950s,

I learned that after being a slut, there was only one quick way to lose a man's respect: that was being a "cockteaser."

Dieter Strand awed me. His modest, but ironic, smile thrilled me, despite his pointy nose, pale pock-marked face, average height, narrow shoulders and straight often-greasy dirty-blond hair. More than six years older than me, he was a visiting instructor from Sweden, teaching political science at Cornell and at the same time gathering material for a weekly column in *Aftonbladet*, a leading daily paper in Stockholm. He was proud that the State Department had, at first, denied his visa because he had written a column claiming that the CIA arranged for the assassination of Lumumba. I, of course, let him know that I had joined the handful of students picketing at the Cornell Student Union to protest the murder of Lumumba.

I was in love with this well-known Swedish journalist who regaled me with stories of the Cuban Revolution, and charmed me by preparing a smorgasbord of homemade delicacies for me and taking me to concerts in theaters with chandeliers and velvet-covered seats. Although I mostly just nodded, our conversations about Marx, Wittgenstein and Sartre—who he had once interviewed—gripped me. It didn't occur to me that his commitment to a state based on social solidarity did not extend to women. I was his intellectual sponge.

Now panic mixed with embarrassment as the circle of blood on the rumpled hotel sheet quickly spread out from the throbbing space between my legs. Soon blood saturated the bottom half of the bed. "Oh, Dieter, I'm really sorry, it hurts a lot. I think I should go to the hospital. I'm losing a lot of blood. I'm scared."

"Arlene, please, calm down. Here, drink some water. Or do you want wine? This is the first time I've been with a virgin. I cannot be sure, but I assume the bleeding will stop soon. And, rest assured. I used a Swedish condom. They never break." He sounded like he regretted having sex with me.

Most people who knew me at school assumed my Bohemian New York style meant I had lots of experience in bed. Often women in the dorm would knock on my door after curfew and, in embarrassed whispers, ask me for advice about sex. I freely gave that advice without ever

revealing it came from books. I knew all about the dangers of pregnancy, but not of hemorrhaging.

As I sat on the edge of the bed, I crossed my legs tightly, took the wine and prayed for the bleeding to stop. I was shivering. The bedding was too bloody to wrap around my shoulders. I wanted Dieter to put his arm around me. Instead, he handed me my sweater.

As he began dressing, he insisted, "You must go home—I mean to your parents' house."

I protested, "But our plan was for me to stay here with you. I've already told my parents I'm spending the night with friends from school."

"I know. I know. But if you do have a problem, I can't be blamed. You know, my visa here is provisional. It is better to call the doctor from your parents' house than from the hotel room where I'm registered. I could lose my fellowship, even be deported."

I gave in. Certainly, I didn't want him to be deported. Yes, I told him that I understood that he would be safer if he did not accompany me to Penn Station. I only silently mumbled to myself that the risk of me hemorrhaging alone on a New York City street frightened me more than the risk of his deportation. I hated that he didn't share my fear, but said nothing to him. I was sure that I would lose any debate over relative risk and also lose his interest in me. So I wedged a couple of Kotex between my legs, added a hotel hand towel for good measure. As I shuffled alone along the two long blocks to Penn Station, I concentrated on not crying.

By the time I made it to my parents' place almost two hours later, those pads, the towel, my tights and slip were saturated with blood. My skirt was also badly stained. I stuffed them all in a pillowcase, wrapped the pillowcase in a bundle of sheets and crammed the huge heap into a space behind some worn out shoes and high school papers at the bottom of my old closet. Those papers triggered a rush of miserable memories of suburban high school blues, which immediately dimmed in light of the present's demands.

I was still bleeding, but not so heavily. The pain subsided. I scrubbed the dried blood off my legs, arranged three more clean Kotex and put on two pairs of panties to absorb the bleeding while I slept. And just to be

sure, I managed to pull a pair of tights over those bulky layers. Thankfully, my parents were already asleep. The next morning, after I woke, some minutes passed before I dared to open my eyes. The sheets were saturated again. After I got rid of the messy wad from between my legs, I mustered the courage to check for new blood. I relaxed a bit when I discovered that the bloody gush had become a trickle. I decided not to look for a doctor.

My period was due two weeks later. Until then, without the slightest deviation, I had menstruated every 29 days. This time my period did not appear on the 29th day, the 30th or even the 31st day. After a week of growing anxiety, I kept an appointment with the doctor in Ithaca who was known to give Cornell women some type of hormone shot to bring on late periods. He was also the only doctor in town who had a reputation for not reporting pregnancies to school authorities. As I lay on my back with my feet in the stirrups, I asked him if my heavy bleeding after that night with Dieter might have been some kind of period. What a relief if that were true. I winced when the doctor struggled to push the cold sharp speculum inside me and replied with a question,

"Did you ordinarily use tampons or sanitary napkins during menstruation?"

"Sanitary napkins. I always wanted to use tampons and would try from time to time, but I never could get one in."

"Miss. Eisen, you were never able to insert a tampon because you probably had the type of hymen that should have been surgically removed. You bled heavily during your first experience with intercourse because your partner was obviously not the surgeon you needed. If the shot I'm giving you doesn't bring your period within a week, you'll have to start making arrangements to have a baby. They won't allow you to stay in school once your pregnancy starts showing. You'll have four or five months to figure things out."

For the next week, whenever I had no class or test or paper deadline, I met with my friend Gail. Of my circle of women friends at Cornell, Gail was the least competitive, least judgmental of the bunch. Regardless of

the question or suggestion, she invariably laughed softly, nodded happily as her long straight light brown hair danced around her waist. Some of the men we knew dismissed her as "Arnie's dumb girlfriend." But I knew better. Like the recently-released inmate of a mental hospital I knew she was, Gail squeezed every ounce of enjoyment out of life.

She also turned out to be a strict coach as she insisted I run up and down the five flights of stairs in the bell tower. Up and down. Up and down. She was adamant that this exercise would bring on my period. Up and down. For days. Up and down. But no period.

Since sixth grade I had dreamed of becoming a foreign correspondent—a reporter like the comic strip heroine, Brenda Starr. Then, as I immersed myself in the swirl of Cornell's leftist politics, I thought I might try to work for an international labor organization or maybe study political science in grad school. I wasn't sure which, but I was sure that motherhood was out of the question. I pictured my perpetually-angry, frustrated mother and shuddered. No, I never wanted to be a mother. And the thought of having to leave school terrified me.

I had heard a rumor that Dolores Bartelli—a junior who lived in my dorm—had gone to Pennsylvania for an abortion the previous summer. Although I personally did not know Dolores, I knew I needed her advice. After hiking around Balch Hall's three wings and through the second and third floors, I caught a glimpse of a woman through an open door with a name plate for "Dolores Bartelli and Naomi Nugent." The door opened a bit wider from the pressure of my timid knock. I saw a woman alone, with her black hair rolled up in thick curlers, reading in bed.

"Are you Dolores?" Please be Dolores.

She nodded. "Yeah, that's me."

Without any preliminaries I blurted.

"I'm in trouble. I need some advice."

"Are you sure you don't want my roommate? She's a dorm assistant." Dolores didn't sit up. Her Brooklyn accent was thicker than mine.

"No," I tried to suppress my impatience. "I'm looking for someone named Dolores Bartelli. I've been told that you might have some information about what I can do if I don't get my period."

She frowned and sat up. "You got three hundred dollars?"

I only had the $25 a month that my parents grudgingly deposited in my checking account. A scholarship covered the rest of my expenses. That day I had written a $2.85 check to pay for a carton of cigarettes. "I have nowhere near that kind of money."

"Well, you'll need it to travel to some coal town near Pittsburgh and to pay the guy who says he's a doctor."

She also explained that in order to avoid arrest, the abortionist kept changing his address and refused to give appointments. I would have to take the chance of making the trip and hope "Dr. Calvin" would be available when I arrived. If not, I would have to make my way to a hotel in Pittsburgh and try calling again the next day. I had to go alone. First, because the trip was too expensive to pay for two. Second, because Dr. Calvin insisted on having no witnesses.

Dolores motioned for me to take a seat across from her on her roommate's bed. Dejected, I listened as she explained these logistics as if she were giving me matter-of-fact instructions about how to find a subway station in our hometown. But this talk cracked the door to her unwanted memories. She dropped her voice to a whisper and spoke quickly.

"You know, I thought I was lucky compared to some girls. Calvin was not drunk, his kitchen table seemed clean and he didn't try to rape me. He gave me a shot of whisky, but no anesthetic." Dolores winced hard when she described the pain of the instrument that forced open her cervix and the knife that scraped out her uterus. "I bled for weeks, but never got an infection or fever, thank god."

Dolores' shoulders involuntarily shuddered, she stiffened and shrugged. I wanted to reach for her, find some words of comfort but before I could, she cut off her account,

"Look," I gotta read this book before my eight o'clock tomorrow morning. I really have nothing more to tell you anyway."

As I stood to go, I prayed I would not have to relive her ordeal. Distracted by my worst fears, I lost track of my feet.

"Careful." She reached for me to block my fall onto her bed.

"Thanks Dolores. Thanks for everything."

I decided that if my period did not appear by New Year's Eve I would ask Dieter for the money for the abortion. Dieter had plans to spend Christmas break in Cuba to report on the third anniversary of the Revolution and return to New York shortly after. Meanwhile, a friend of Dolores told me about her sister who bled to death after an abortion. I began collecting unwanted horror stories. All my anxiety centered on finding a safe way to end the pregnancy. It never occurred to me to question my moral right to abort the baby that might be growing inside me.

Dieter didn't return from Cuba until January 7, 1962. Then, for days, he ignored my calls. He had no way to know that I was about to ask for a month of his instructors' fellowship money for an abortion. I found out from Gail that he had other reasons for avoiding me. She had heard from her boyfriend that Dieter simply could not decide if a relationship with me complicated his life too much. After all, his fiancée in Sweden expected to marry him when he returned. Before then, I had no idea he was engaged. With that news I sank into a miserable depression. Final exams approached. I couldn't focus on reading a page, let alone study.

When Dieter and I accidentally crossed paths on campus, he invited me to dinner. During the meal, I could not summon the courage to tell him that I might be pregnant or to ask him about his engagement. I was relieved and thrilled that he invited me to his apartment after dinner. I believed I loved him and it would have been too painful to admit that our sex that night in the Hotel Martinique would turn out to be a one-night stand.

While he opened the sofa bed, he stroked the embroidered monogram on the sheet. "Look at those beautiful, intricate stitches. I inherited these sheets from my grandmother."

I nodded and went to the bathroom while he finished making the bed. And there, turning from bright to rusty red on my panties, was the start of my period. A brief sob of relief broke from my throat. Then anxiety returned. I couldn't possibly leave blood stains on Dieter's heirloom sheets.

Peru: Tania before Tania[2] (1963)

After junior year, I left New York in the humid summer of 1963 and arrived a few days later in Huaraz's dry winter. Cornell had awarded me a fellowship to spend the summer in Peru to do field work on the political role of trade unions in Huaraz. There were four of us students from Cornell who had been selected for the project that summer. I had designed the research proposal to continue my political education, but once I learned I had been chosen, excitement over the adventure of travel in South America eclipsed my interest in any research objectives.

In Huaraz, a provincial capital high in the Andes, the days were mild and sunny, but, at 10,000 feet elevation, the nights were frigid. I wrapped myself in the three sweaters I had packed and burrowed under a rough wool blanket. Despite this, from the first night, until the day when I kissed the Sánchez family goodbye almost three months later, I never felt warm enough to sleep soundly in the chilly damp adobe home of my host family. Rafael Sánchez, a barrel-chested *Indígena* man, fond of wearing a Western suit and tie, was proud of the five-room house he had built with his own hands. His wife, Esperanza, was shorter than her husband by two heads. Señora Sánchez supervised the household from a high perch of Catholic discipline.

2 Tania, was one of the aliases of Haydée Tamara Bunke Bider, born 1937, to German Communists, refugees from Hitler, and raised in Argentina. In her early twenties she worked in Cuba and was trained as a spy and combatant, to support the guerrilla campaign of Che Guevara in Bolivia. The Bolivian Army, under the direction of the CIA, killed her in 1967. After her death she became a hero to internationalist liberation fighters, especially women.

Sheep, rabbits, and guinea pigs wandered in and out of the house from the yard. The two young adolescent sons shared the smallest bedroom. The two older teenaged daughters and Dorilla, Sánchez' 20-year-old sister-in-law, shared a double bed in another room. Señor supplemented his meager bricklayer's wage with the earnings from renting to an occasional border. I paid him 500 *sole*s monthly—$20 in those days—in exchange for room and board.

Each morning I shuddered as I washed myself in the basin of freezing water that Señora left outside my door. Then, I joined the family in the dining room, at a long rough wooden table, for breakfast: potatoes—sometimes fried, sometimes charred, over her hearth in the backyard—and hot chocolate made with water. Then, the children left for school, in blue uniforms and beret-like hats and I left for the Office of the Cornell Peru Project.

The walk from the Sánchez home on Jiron Áncash to the office near the Plaza de Armas in the center of town was less than ten minutes. Most colonial towns were built by the Conquistadors as military garrisons to control the Indians they press-ganged into work in the mines. Founded in the 1570s, Huaraz was no exception.

From almost any vantage point, Huascarán, the tallest mountain in Peru, loomed over the city. Its glacier-covered peaks piercing the clouds 22,000 feet above sea level, emerged from the snow-capped mountains of the Cordillera Blanca to the west of town. Despite the quaint balconies and stunning scenery, I didn't enjoy the walk. Rafael had warned me that most of the dogs in town had rabies. I often took a circuitous route to avoid even a small barking dog. There seemed to be hundreds of them.

I offered a friendly nod to the few people I passed, but my attention stayed on the hard cold dirt ground—covered with jagged pebbles and glass—bordered by a narrow stream of foul-smelling sewage. As I neared the office, closer to the Plaza de Armas, cobblestones replaced the dirt that surfaced the narrow streets. Along the way, most of the children I passed, and many of the adult *Indígenas* were barefoot. A useless regret crossed my mind: before I left the States, I should have collected donations of used shoes to give away to the barefoot children of Huaraz.

HUARAZ, Peru, July 1963. Rafael Sanchez, President of local Construction Workers Union, his wife, Esperanza, and their children in front of the home he built, and where Arlene boarded.

Our Project Director had mentioned that Rafael Sánchez was relatively well-off compared to the majority of *Indígenas* whose kids often died of disease and starvation. Rafael had a house, a job and a position as the president of the local Construction Workers Union. Yet, there was no heat or running water in his house. The tiny bulb in my room—too dim for reading—was the only electricity I saw in the house.

This was my introduction to Third World poverty—the real-world consequence of the imperial plunder we left wing students at Cornell had often discussed. In Huaraz, the sight of barefoot, half naked children, with their legs swollen and eyes sunken invariably left me on the verge of tears. My privilege in the face of the daily grind of misery all around me made me feel worse. I had to help, but I had no idea how. Lack of sleep and altitude sickness left me dizzy, often with nausea that only chocolate bars temporarily remedied. Then I felt guilty about eating chocolate while so many children starved.

It wasn't just the poverty and altitude that kept me off balance. In our seminar to prepare us for fieldwork in Huaraz, our Anthropology Professor, Henry F. Dobyns—a veteran of years in the field—had warned us, "no matter what you do, you will be living in a goldfish bowl. The townspeople will observe and gossip about every move you make." He insisted we be polite at all times so as not to jeopardize the status of the Cornell Peru Project. Inevitably, I feared, us *estudiantes norteamericanos* would provoke a rumble of scandal in that provincial capital of fewer than 25,000 people.

My fears of committing a gross social offense were complicated by what I thought I had learned in Anthropology 101 about "cultural relativism" and "Eurocentrism". Freshman year, I had been exhilarated by the discovery that the rat race for material status symbols that tormented me in Merrick, my home town, was not universal. The idea that suburban New Yorkers had no monopoly on the right to define "human nature" liberated me.

But now, as I navigated the alleys of Huaraz, the constant need to recalibrate my assumptions about normality disoriented and sometimes frightened me. Rafael, my host, had told me that the local police had a history of rounding up *Indígenas* and shooting them, while not a judge or politician lifted a finger to punish them. Yet, when I passed a "*Guardia Civil*" on the streets of Huaraz, he smiled and touched his hat in deference to me. I wanted to scream, "You murderer!" I trembled from the thought that I could get away with venting my anger when a Quechua-speaking *Indígena* might die for it.

When upset, I often lit up a cigarette. Yet, in Peru, I knew not to light a cigarette in public. Still when a woman covered in a black shawl and long black skirt frowned at me as I passed her in the street, I winced. Certainly, I didn't want to be taken for an "Ugly American" or jailed for being a prostitute. I knew that once I committed a social sin, I could not talk my way out of it. I spoke Spanish, but not well enough to understand group conversations or to convey subtle meanings. My verbal sense of humor disappeared.

The first day in the office, Mario Vasquez, Cornell's field work coordinator in Huaraz, gave me a list of trade union activists to interview. Ma-

rio, a short Quechua-speaking mestizo, pointed his stubby index finger at Carlos Valenzuela's name near the top of the list. "Don't interview him first." Mario warned. "He's one of the most politically-conscious trade unionists in Huaraz, although officially public service workers aren't even allowed to unionize. I don't want you to expect everyone will be as interesting as him. He has very strong opinions on the role of trade unions in Peru. He'll bias the rest of your work. Be careful of him."

So, for two days, my field notes, dutifully headed with my name, the date, name of informant, subject and setting—typed in triplicate with two layers of carbon paper—recorded an interview with Rios, the head of the Teamsters Union, and all my conversations with Rafael Sánchez. Rios insisted his union was completely "apolitical" and its only problem was that members didn't pay enough dues. Rafael told me that Rios was corrupt, a semi-landowner.

I was impatient to talk to Carlos Valenzuela. Finally, I followed the map Mario had drawn to the office of the *Junta de Obras Públicas—JOP* (Public Works Board) where I could make an appointment with Valenzuela, President of the Union of Public Employees of Huaraz. As far as I knew, the only phones in town were at the Telegraph Office and the fancy hotel on the hill. An out of plumb balcony made the JOP building look like an abandoned saloon or brothel—something from the set of an old Western movie. I knocked. No one answered. The door was ajar, so I walked into an unlit hallway. Adjusting my eyes to the darkness, I yelled, in my formal Spanish, "*Buenas tardes!"* Then, from someone standing at the top of the staircase at the end of the hallway: "Greetings. Come on up, but watch your step." His tone was friendly, his Spanish less formal.

The stairs creaked and groaned. I imagined myself crashing through the rotten wood. As I neared the top, light from another door that opened onto the balcony revealed a tall, lean, mestizo man with piercing almond shaped brown eyes and a chiseled square jaw. His wide lips formed a playful smile. I estimated he was in his early thirties.

"Who did you say you wanted to meet with?" He asked me.

"Carlos Valenzuela," I read the name off my list. "I think he works for the *Junta de Obras Públicas*."

The man's smile expanded. "That's me. Why does a beautiful young

woman like you want to talk to me?" He made no effort to hide his approval of the 20 year-old North American student who stood before him. Although remarks about my appearance usually put me on guard, Carlos' respectful handshake set me at ease. Still, rather than meet his eyes as we shook hands, I gazed out the balcony, and marveled at the gigantic, snow-covered mountain in the distance.

"Come in, come in." He pointed to an open door labeled "*Ingeniero*." Inside his office he motioned for me to sit in the only chair in the room besides the one behind the desk. The desk and the rest of the room were bare except for an old typewriter on a rusted typing table.

Involuntarily, I thought of Lucho and Pedro—my anti-imperialist Chilean friends from Cornell. Carlos seemed so much more confident—at home—in a way Lucho and Pedro never were in Ithaca, New York.

I explained in my best Spanish the purpose of the interview.

"No, I don't need a photograph. Yes, I have to take notes."

Carlos pressed. "What do you intend to do with the notes? Who will see them?"

"Just me and the three other students in the Cornell Peru Project. And Mario Vasquez too. He's like our professor. After he checks our field notes, he may have some suggestions for more questions."

"Oh, so Mario Vasquez is directing your project. Are you a liberal like him?"

His tone was playful as if he were inviting me to a guessing game, but I knew he would take my answer seriously. From our debates at our Fair Play for Cuba Committee at Cornell, I had an abstract idea about the difference between liberals and radicals. Liberals thought reforms could fix poverty and racism. Radicals thought we needed to overhaul the entire system. Mario had warned that Carlos Valenzuela was politically-conscious. I cursed myself for not asking him more about the substance of that consciousness. I decided to hedge my answer to Carlos and stalled. I poked around in my purse for a cigarette and offered him one. I remembered too late that women didn't smoke in public. Carlos shook his head, but reached for the matches in my hand and lit mine. I inhaled slowly before tackling his question. I wished we could switch

to English. Against the rules of the Cornell Peru project, I asked Carlos, *"Habla Inglés?"*

"No, I'm sorry. I speak no English. I only had time to study one language, so I decided to learn Quechua, the language of the real Peruvians, not English. You know, our Public Employees Union at JOP is the only union that includes *Indígenas*." I nodded and smiled. I wanted to impress him.

"Of course, in Peru, you have feudalism where a few landlords not only own all the land, they also own the peasants on the land. You can never get rid of poverty and the servitude of Indígenas *without getting rid of feudalism altogether. So, in Peru, it makes sense to be a radical. But in the United States—the situation is not so bad—it may be possible to get rid of poverty with reforms."*

I concluded and smiled hoping I had chosen the correct Spanish wording.

Carlos chuckled. And shot a series of rapid-fire questions at me. "You really think so? Do you think Black people, sharecroppers, in the United States are so much better off than *Indígenas* are here? What do you think the US would do if we got rid of feudalism here? Do you know what they did when the people in Guatemala voted against feudalism?" The substance of his questions challenged me, but his tone remained playful, even gentle.

I tried to remember what Pedro, back at Cornell, had said about Guatemala. But before I could bring those freshman-year conversations to mind, Carlos answered for me, "The CIA overthrew their new government." Then, to make sure I understood he had nothing against me personally, he leaned over as if inviting me into his conspiracy and whispered, "To tell you the truth, I don't trust Mario Vasquez. He has worked for the *gringos* too long."

I was relieved that this attractive man who I needed to interview seemed to distinguish me from my boss. Yet, his contempt for Mario caught me off guard. Mario enjoyed a reputation among Cornell professors for having won the trust and affection of the *Indígenas* in Vicos. Vicos had been a feudal plantation that Cornell purchased so that the best anthropology minds at Cornell could apply their social engineering

theory to transform a traditional feudal hacienda into a democratic cooperative. Regardless, I decided: I wasn't there to defend Mario, I was there to arrange an interview. I glanced around for an ashtray and cleared my throat. Carlos pushed a saucer across the desk towards me.

"I'm sorry, Señor Valenzuela, I don't know the answers to all those questions. But I would like to hear your opinions. Also, if I can't set up an interview with you, my report will be missing important information. Please will you permit me to interview you?"

"Well, Miss Researcher, how much time do you think you will need?"

I guessed Carlos decided I was too young and too naïve to threaten him or his organization. He must have assumed the CIA would use a more seasoned researcher than this young woman. Besides, I soon learned, he had the spirit of an organizer who could not resist the opportunity to convince a newcomer to join Peru's revolutionary struggle.

"That depends on you," I answered without suppressing my smile as I flipped the pages of my notebook. "I have a list of questions. One person I interviewed answered them in a half hour. I definitely would not need to take more than two hours of your time." We made an appointment for the following afternoon, after lunch, 3PM, *hora inglesa.*

Mario had taught us field workers that Peruvians used a scale of punctuality that reflected internalized stereotypes against their own culture: *hora peruana* meant the meeting might happen somewhere between a half hour and two hours later than the designated time. *Hora americana* suggested a meeting ten or 15 minutes later than the agreed time but *hora inglesa* required absolute punctuality.

The next day, Carlos Valenzuela was waiting for me when I arrived exactly on time. Mario had also taught us to begin interviews with flowery Peruvian-style thank-you's and then ask general questions to break the ice. Later, once the "informant" was at ease, we could ask about personal backgrounds and probe controversial political questions. I began as instructed and concluded the list of ice-breaking questions with: "So, Señor Valenzuela, what are the goals of your trade union?"

"Please, you can call me Carlos or *Compañero* Carlos or *Compañero*,

but don't call me Señor Valenzuela. I am not your boss and I own no land," he announced with pride.

Wonderful. Formal interview protocol didn't come naturally to me. "Okay, Carlos, what are the goals of your trade union?"

"You can't understand anything about contemporary trade unionism in Peru without understanding José Carlos Mariátegui. Have you heard of Mariátegui?"

"No, do you think I should interview him?"

Carlos laughed hard. He was still chuckling when he caught his breath and quietly explained: "No. That's not possible, my new friend. He's been dead since 1930. Mariátegui founded our movement. He studied socialism and Marxism and *indigenismo* and adapted it all to the Peruvian reality..."

Maybe I should have been embarrassed, but Carlos seemed to enjoy my interest and ignored my ignorance. I mused to myself, "so this is the difference between an academic teacher, who invariably made me feel small when I asked a stupid question, and a political leader who needs his followers to be as strong as possible." I felt warm when I concluded Carlos wanted to build my confidence. I had read about such leaders, but never met one face to face.

I struggled to take notes in English as Carlos continued his account in Spanish of Mariátegui's ideas and contribution to the contemporary political landscape of Peru. Occasionally he stopped, smiled and asked,

"Do you understand, Arlene?" or "Arlene, do you agree?"

I nodded, thrilled that he really cared if I understood and flattered that he sought my agreement. He continued and continued. The sun was setting and his story remained in the 1920s. He had to work the following day, but agreed to continue the interview the day after that. He promised he would get to my questions then.

I did not care that he ignored his promise during our second session. Or the third. I thoroughly enjoyed the Peruvian history lessons, and his attention. Towards the end of the first week, he announced he could not meet the following week, that he had orders to inspect some roads and other public works in the Callejón de Huaylas. He saw my disappointment.

"You could come with us," he offered. "It would be good for you to get out of town and learn firsthand something about the countryside."

That evening, as I typed my day's field notes at the Cornell Peru project office, I asked Mario for permission to travel with Carlos. Mario seemed amused, nodded his assent but asked, "Did he say if he'd be going through Marcará?"

"No, he didn't say the name of any town. What's Marcará?"

"That's the town that the Huapra hacienda owner controls. Three years ago, the police from Marcará massacred three *Indígenas* in cold blood just because they asked for a school. If you go through there, don't say anything about the Cornell Peru project. They still blame our example at Vicos for inciting 'their' *Indígenas*."

I stopped typing my notes and smiled too brightly at Mario. "Don't worry. I'm sure Carlos will know how to handle the situation."

Mario picked up the notecard I had just completed, glanced at it and placed it gently on the desk. "It's not Carlos I'm worried about." He paused, tilted his head and then changed the subject. "Well, just make sure you take enough *soles* with you to pay for your own room."

Until Mario mentioned lodging, I hadn't considered the issue. Now, the thought of possibly sharing a room with Carlos momentarily fascinated me.

Since I was the only Cornell woman in the Student Summer Project, Mario seemed to take particular pleasure in teasing me.

"Hey, Arlene, listen to me. Huaraz is a small town. We all know each other's business. Although Carlos doesn't live with his wife anymore, he is still married. Don't get your hopes up. In Peru, divorces are rare. Very rare. He's a charismatic guy and respects Indígenas unlike most mestizos in town. A lot of people look up to him. I understand that you enjoy his attention, but, for your own safety, keep your objectivity—or at least your distance."

I hadn't known he was married. I had to admit that the news disappointed me. Until Mario's taunt, it never occurred to me to ask about Carlos' marital status. What right did I have to question Carlos' honesty with me or fidelity to his wife? None, I concluded. All we had ever done was talk.

Before dawn the following Monday, Carlos and Miguel, his taciturn co-worker, called for me at my boarding house in their orange pick up truck. A decal, *Junta de Obras Públicas*, on the side door, announced we were on official business. We headed north. Miguel, who, except for his very curly hair and height, had the features of his Incan parents, casually held the steering wheel with confidence as if he were navigating a newly paved highway, not the rutted dirt road that we traveled. I sat between him and Carlos in the truck's cab, conscious of the excitement I felt as my thigh pressed against Carlos's. Shadows of the town of Huaraz disappeared into the horizon behind us. The sky turned into a reddish purple haze and I could see a dark outline of the Cordillera Blanca receding into the horizon. It looked foreboding, like an uninhabited planet about to collide with earth. Within minutes, as red and purple became orange and pink, the peaks of the snow-capped Andes metamorphosed from black to purple. And finally, as the sky became bluer, the peaks became a blinding white.

I closed my eyes against the glare and felt dizzy again. I hoped the nausea would pass before I would have to ask them to stop the truck—which would have blocked the road. My face felt clammy. I reached into my pocket for a spearmint-flavored Chiclet.

Carlos must have noticed. "Arlene, are you feeling car sick? Maybe it's the altitude?"

Did my face look green? Although we were riding along a valley between the glaciers and the Cordillera Negra, Carlos explained we were still some 11,000 feet above sea level. From the balcony of Carlos's office, he had pointed out Huascarán, Peru's highest peak. Now, driving along the side of the glacier-covered colossus that towered more than 10,000 feet above us, with no buildings to interrupt the view, I thought, if there is an omnipotent, punishing god, he must sit on top of Huascarán.

Suddenly, I remembered Mario's warning about Marcará. "Will we be going to Marcará?" I hoped I didn't sound frightened.

Miguel shook his head. "We passed by it before the sun was high enough for you to see the sign."

Carlos interjected. "Arlene. What have you heard about Marcará?" He spat out the name in disgust."

"Mario told me that three years ago police from that town killed some *Indígenas* when they asked for a school in Huapra. Is it true?"

"Yes, they're a bunch of murdering dogs. But they were just following orders of the *hacendado,* trying to set an example so no other *Indígenas* would make any demands."

"So what has happened since then? Did the landlord get his way?"

"Hell no. Have you heard the slogan, *Tierra o Muerte*?"

"Land or death," I translated in my head and then repeated in Spanish. "I think I saw photos of banners with that slogan when I was at the Campesinos's Union office in Lima. But I thought that movement was just in the south, near Cuzco. Someone at the Office told me that the land invasion movement ended once they arrested Hugo Blanco, their leader."

This time, Carlos's chuckle sounded more like a snicker. "Whoever told you that either works for the landlords or doesn't know anything. With or without Blanco, peasants all over the Sierra—including right here," he pointed towards the side of the road, "are willing to die for the right to their own land. The days of landlords forcing *Indigenas* to work for nothing are over."

"But what about the landlord who owns Huapra and the police he controls in Marcará?" I dared to ask.

"After the murders, the *Indigenas* in Huapra, Vicos and the other haciendas around here were so furious, they surrounded the police and nearly stoned them to death. Neither the landlord nor the police have dared to return since then. That's a part of the story the Cornell liberals don't want you to know."

"That's good news! I mean about how the people in Huapra won out!" I also wondered to myself, if I couldn't trust Mario to tell me the whole story, who could I trust?

Miguel yanked the steering wheel sharply to the right and barely avoided a large pothole that would have swallowed the left-side tires. If he had veered inches further to our left, the truck would have been launched off the cliff into a ravine hundreds of feet below. To brace myself so I wouldn't interfere with Miguel's steering, I grabbed Carlos'

arm. Carlos ignored both the sudden lurch of the truck and my grasp and continued:

"One more thing about *Tierra o Muerte*. Mark my words. Soon there will be a wave of land recoveries right here in the Department of Áncash. The peasants are desperate, and for the first time, they won't have to sacrifice alone. Our Union has passed a resolution to support the Indians' struggle to end *gamonalismo*."

"Gamonalismo?"

"That's the Peruvian version of feudalism where the landlords not only control the peasants, but also control the local government and military. We have a kind of triple layer of colonialism in this country. US imperialism controls the oligarchy on the Coast and they feed off of the landlords in the Sierra whose power rests on the backs of the peasants. When the *Indígenas*, the peasants, rise up, the whole system will crumble. That's why our Union members have finally broken with the tradition of excluding *Indígenas* and try to respect their struggle."

I marveled at how Carlos sounded so clear, so sure—with all the puzzle pieces fitting neatly together. My head hurt from concentrating on each new piece of information he brought into the picture. Before I could ask for more, he sighed, "That's enough of politics for now. Are you hungry?"

"Not really." The gum had kept the nausea at bay but my stomach roiled and I wasn't sure I could hold down any food.

Nevertheless, he insisted on stopping to look for breakfast in the village of Yungay. Still menacing, Huascarán loomed directly over us.[3] A small Coca Cola sign on a wooden door announced what appeared to be the only store in the village. Still dizzy, I stayed in the truck with Miguel while Carlos went to check the store. He returned with a cup of tea and a Hershey bar. He touched my shoulder as he held the tea up to my lips. His concern comforted and stirred me. I recognized that I took too much pleasure in the intimacy of the moment. Here was a man I might

3 Seven years later, on May 31, 1970, an earthquake triggered an avalanche from Huascarán that buried Yungay, Ranrahirca and smaller communities and leveled 80% of the buildings in Huaraz. Tens of thousands of people in the Callejón de Huaylas died, including most of the population of Huaraz.

love for what he was teaching me—like Dieter, my first lover. But Carlos was also a man who treated me as if it was important to him that I feel good—so unlike Dieter's indifference.

The plan was to spend three days traveling from village to village, assessing roads for landslide damage, measuring them and investigating how the lack of roads contributed to the hardship of village life. Driving the rutted, unpaved roads after nightfall was too dangerous. On previous trips, Carlos and Miguel usually drove until the sun went down. Then they found a place where the road widened, pulled the truck over and slept amidst the piles of llama blankets in the back of the pick up truck. When I understood that Carlos planned to end the usual work day early, so I could stay in a room at the only hotel within a day's drive, I protested.

"I don't want to interfere with your work. Let's keep going. I can sleep in the truck too."

Carlos firmly rejected my proposal. "Maybe men in your country would allow such a thing, but we *peruanos* are not so crude." I suppressed an impulse to defend the practicality of my suggestion long enough to remind myself that this was an example of our cultural differences, not his social failings. And so, when we arrived at Caraz, although it was only 4PM and still light, he pulled the truck up to the front of the Hotel de Huaylas and parked. Carlos insisted on paying for a room for me. The clerk gave him a confused look when Carlos told him, "I need a single room with a single bed for the lady." I gave Carlos my passport and he passed it on to the clerk—whose raised eyebrows disappeared into the folds of his forehead when he palmed the US passport. "I think he's surprised you're a *gringa*," Carlos whispered to me. With my dark brown hair and olive complexion, I was often relieved that I could pass for something other than white North American. The three of us went through a door at the side of the lobby to the restaurant. The hotel clerk had already prepared the only item on the menu: a stew of guinea pig, onions and potatoes. Dinner was over before the moon came up. No one was sleepy.

We were the only customers in the restaurant. The clerk wanted to close, but it was only 6PM. I had, what seemed to me, a reasonable suggestion. "Why don't we continue our conversation upstairs in my room?" I noticed Carlos exchange glances with Miguel. He shrugged, "Why not?"

And the three of us climbed the one flight of steps up to room number two. I surveyed the room quickly. It might have been a monk's cell. There was a narrow cot on one wall, a wash basin on top of a small table on the other, along with an ancient armoire for clothes. When I pulled aside a faded blue curtain, a boarded-up window stared back. A plain wooden cross was mysteriously fixed to the cement wall above the bed.

I assumed the role of hostess, sat on the floor, adjusted my skirt so it covered my legs to my ankles, and indicated to my guests that they could sit on the bed. They did not object. I tried to direct the conversation back to the politics of Carlos's Union of Civil Service Workers. He seemed reluctant to talk about politics. "Arlene, you certainly are a serious student. I admire that. But Miguel here has not yet joined our Union. I don't want to bore him. Let's talk about something else. Why don't you tell us something about your home?"

Carlos's suggestion pleased me. I wanted him to be interested in me and my home, but had no idea where to start. "Well, what would you like to know?"

"Your passport says you were born in New York. Tell us about New York."

I was a proud New Yorker. I had often commented that anyone raised outside of New York City was a hick. However, this time, I responded more politely, "New York is the biggest, most important city in the United States." Carlos prodded me with follow-up questions for each answer I gave. Why did I think New York was important? How did the City's ten million residents earn their living—especially the Black and Puerto Rican people there? He asked about Wall Street and about Cornell University. Miguel listened silently and finally announced he was tired—would we mind if he turned in.

"*Claro que no*," Carlos and I answered in unison, then we both laughed. Of course, we didn't mind.

After Miguel left, awareness that I was now alone in a hotel room with Carlos, a married man, made me yank again on my skirt to cover as much skin as possible. He was still sitting on the cot and I was still sitting cross-legged on the floor. I stared at his forearms and long fingers. I tried to ignore the impulse I felt to reach up across the narrow patch

of tile floor between us to run my hand along the line the muscles of his forearm made.

"So, Arlene, was it always your dream to become a student at Cornell?" he resumed our conversation at the very point where Miguel's departure had interrupted it.

I paused, unable to answer his question. I was too preoccupied with whether to reach for his hand or run my finger along the ridge of that muscle in his forearm. I exhaled and cleared my throat. "No, actually, I never really wanted to go to Cornell, especially not the tuition-free state school there. I thought I wanted to go to one of the elite girls' schools connected to Harvard or Brown, but I couldn't afford that. Then once I got to Cornell's School of Industrial and Labor Relations, I met people who taught me things I never would have learned at Radcliffe or Pembroke. I hardly recognize the person I was three years ago. Now I would never consider going to one of those upper-class schools. Besides, if I had never gone to Cornell, I never would have come to Peru or met you."

Just like that it came out, without me deciding. Then, thinking how my back hurt, I reached for his hand for help to pull me to my feet, to stretch. He kissed my hand. He kissed my forehead, my cheek, my arm. I buried my face in the space between his neck and shoulder.

"Arlene, if you want to stop, we can."

I answered his offer by kissing him on the mouth. We laughed and kissed again.

Our heat kept that small room warm for hours. Finally, we dozed.

Towards dawn, Carlos whispered, "I'm going back to the truck. We don't want Cornell University to be involved in any scandal."

Suddenly, I was sitting up, wide awake, and panicked. Was he saying the night, which was just about over, would be our first and only time together? He must have noticed my distress. "Don't worry, Arlene, I'll be back soon to get you for breakfast. I couldn't stand being away from you for very long. Seriously, Arlene, I have never met a woman like you. You North Americans may not believe in love at first sight, but we Peruvians do. We're hopeless romantics."

He closed the door gently before I could speak. Did I believe in love at first sight, I wondered. I didn't think so. But I knew that he made me feel like I mattered—a new and immediately indispensable feeling for me.

If Miguel recognized the signs that his travel companions in the front seat of the JOP truck had become lovers, he kept his suspicions to himself. During the remaining two days of their survey of public works in the Department of Áncash, after hours of inching along treacherous unpaved roads and trails, we stopped at each small village: Recuay, Shumay and Ranrahirca. They were isolated *Indígena* communities with no running water, electricity or garbage service. In Ecash, I watched Carlos frown, shake his head, then smile and nod and take notes after brief conversations in Quechua with elders wearing frayed bright wool ponchos and tattered sandals. While Carlos wrote, Miguel took photos of dry, caked mud paths, dry wells and piles of garbage where mangy dogs scavenged. I stood apart, silent, patiently waiting until we returned to the truck where Carlos reported, "These *Indigenas* are tired of politicians' promises. I don't know how, but they have heard of the uprisings around Cuzco. They won't wait much longer. If the new President doesn't do something fast, there will be more blood in the Central Sierra too. I told him he could count on the support of our Union. I hope he believed me."[4]

Carlos' excitement was contagious. This chance to witness history thrilled me. I hated the thought of returning to Huaraz, leaving Carlos' side, facing Mario's cynical questions and tediously typing up each day's new field notes in triplicate. This was only the third afternoon after we had taken to the road, but to me, it felt like a lifetime.

As we approached the outskirts of Huaraz, Carlos pointed to a vacant construction site. A lonely *Indígena* in threadbare pants and a pon-

4 A few weeks later, at the end of July, right after Belaúnde Terry was inaugurated, thousands of peasants followed the example of the *Indígenas* at Chinchausisi in Junín. They invaded the hacienda, erected tents and began building sod huts. Within months some 300,000 *Indígenas*, including those at Ecash, had occupied the land they had worked for centuries as unpaid laborers. The feudal system in the Sierra never recovered.

cho sat on a slab of concrete to one side of a pile of stones. "Hey Miguel, there's Imelsa. Pull over." Miguel brought the truck to a sudden stop.

"What's Imelsa?" I didn't see the point of stopping, but I welcomed any delay in our return to the dreary routine in Huaraz.

"Imelsa is a big construction company based in Lima. Just imagine: it has imperialist investors and millions of dollars, but it hasn't paid its poor peon workers in Huaraz for five weeks. Not a *sole*, for five weeks. That's how the *gringo* vampires suck us dry!"

"And they can get away with that?" I asked as Carlos jumped down from the truck. I accepted the hand he had extended to help me get down and resisted an urge to squeeze it.

"It looks like they can. The day we left town, the Construction Workers Union started a strike—just to be paid their pitiful wages. But where are they now? Any scab can come marching in. With all the starving peasants around here, as soon as word gets out that there's no picket line, Imelsa will be flooded with scabs to break the strike."

Carlos approached the *Indígena* who looked too exhausted to guard anything. "*Compañero*, is the strike over? Where is everybody?"

"They went home for siesta. My house is too far or else I would be there too."

"And how long is the siesta?" Carlos was incredulous.

"Three hours. Three hours more or less. *Hora peruana*."

Carlos glanced at his watch and threw up his arms. "Let's go." And we returned to the truck. "Now there's a lesson in the weakness of workers' unions in the provinces. The only people you can count on for resistance, let alone revolution, are the peasants."

❧

We returned to Huaraz in ecstatic love. We made some attempt to resume our "normal" lives. I interviewed other trade union leaders. Carlos wrote his civil engineering reports on the state of roads and utilities in the Callejón de Huaylas. In the weeks that followed our return, we dared not spend a night together. I didn't want to give Cornell an excuse to exclude women from the program in the future. Rather, we met almost

every afternoon in his office where he fashioned a soft pallet on the floor. When I finally had the courage to ask about his wife, Carlos told me he was in love with me and he had already talked to a priest about annulling his marriage. He wanted me to meet the other comrades in his organization. "But haven't I already met the *compañeros* in the Public Employees' Union?" I wondered aloud.

"No. I'm not talking about them. I'm talking about the real revolutionary organization. I'm talking about MIR."

"MIR?"

"*Movimiento de la Izquierda Revolucionaria*.Read this and we'll talk more." He had handed me a pile of mimeographed yellowed pages stapled together. The cover read, *Manifiesto de Chiclayo-DRAFT.* I poured over those pages, with a Spanish-English dictionary in one hand and pen and notebook to keep track of my questions in the other. I wasn't sure I had understood the whole thing, but I did get the gist of it. MIR called for an armed insurrection in the Sierra, based among militant peasants who would seize *hacendados'* property and set up militias to defend their recuperated land. From the Sierra heart of Peru, the revolution would spread to the Coast and eventually defeat the imperialists and their "oligarchic Peruvian lackeys." MIR joined with revolutionary movements throughout the continent, inspired by the Cuban revolution.

Carlos pleaded with me to stay in Peru and join him in making this history. If I would marry him, his dream of having a revolutionary wife would become reality. I had a hard time believing him. After Dieter, I had kept my relationships with men constrained—without commitment or comradeship. Besides, I thought of myself as a sophisticated New Yorker who knew better than to believe in such whirlwind romance.

Nevertheless, I did agree to go on another trip with him. My responsibilities with the Cornell Peru Project ended mid-August, the same time as his annual vacation. We decided to travel to Cuzco together and, along the way, he would introduce me to the comrades of MIR. In each province, during the days, we visited ancient pyramids, parks or churches. We made love in the tall grass not far from the partially excavated ruins of Chavín de Huántar. He showed me how to extract a needle and thread from a huge cactus growing near our blanket. At night we met, in dark-

ened rooms with men who spoke in rushed whispers. I picked up phrases like "*como en Cuba*," but little else. Afterwards, when we were finally alone in whatever lumpy bed we could find, Carlos patiently explained conversations that had gone by too fast for me to understand. "We will begin our revolution in three columns, the Sierra and maybe the jungle too—among the *Indígenas*, the most oppressed. From there it will spread to the towns."

By the end of the summer, I could not imagine a meaningful life without Carlos. He was my revolutionary prince charming who would rescue me from the dreary prospect of protesting as part of a tiny minority inside the US I had no doubt that I wanted to join him to free Peru and the world from US imperialism. So, I promised Carlos I would return to Peru to marry him—the man who both challenged and cherished me. First, I would finish my last year at Cornell in one semester, raise money for the guerrilla insurgency and then return to Peru. Upon my return, I would serve in Lima, as a liaison between urban financial backers and equipment suppliers and the revolutionaries in the Sierras. My US passport would protect us all. At last, I had a reason to look forward to the future. If I had doubts that MIR's plan would work, if I had fears about putting my life in danger, my twenty-year-old's political outrage at injustice and optimism about revolutionary potential, and my hunger for love and adventure prevented those doubts and fears from reaching my consciousness.

I was so sure I would return that I left a suitcase full of clothing—including my favorite shoes—with a woman friend in Lima. I had bought the shoes in Bilbao, Spain, where I had worked in a factory the previous summer. They were fancy loafers made from very soft leather with an amazing thick, soft-ribbed rubber sole that would last forever.

Alone, on the plane, somewhere enroute from Lima, Peru to Idlewild Airport in New York City, the eyes of the passengers in the row facing mine seemed to fix on me as they whispered to each other. To calm my mounting fears, I reported my observations in the margins of the airline's magazine. In code, one at a time, I scrawled each word in a jagged vertical pile: *"Aic el rop saipse res nebed rejum anu y serbmoh sod."* To decipher the

scribbles, a reader would have to read Spanish backwards: "Two men and one woman must be spies for the CIA"

It was the end of the summer of 1963. I had declared myself an enemy of the Peruvian oligarchy and its US sponsors. My twenty-first birthday approached and I had no idea that I was pregnant. Some might mistake that hormone-fueled emotional roller coaster for a mental breakdown. In fact, I was terrified. Somehow, I made my way from Idlewild Airport to my parents' house. For three days I refused to sleep, eat, drink or talk. I knew that any food or beverage might contain some type of truth serum. If I answered any questions, they might use my words against me, Carlos and our comrades. I hid in my old room and spent hours lying in a fetal curl, staring at the wall, straining to figure out how I might escape the dangers that awaited me.

"I Don't Belong Here" (1963-1964)

After my mother died in 1987, I excavated her dresser and night table drawers, which were compacted with the sediment of a lifetime of greeting cards, letters, photos, cancelled checks, expired driver's licenses and condom wrappers. Finally, in the bottom drawer of the night table a small bundle of papers enveloped by a brochure from South Oaks Psychiatric Hospital brought my search to a halt. Just staring at the thing frightened me. Sweat soaked through my nightgown to the bathrobe. I was breathing hard. I realized I had found evidence, documents that would untangle fact and legend from the year I lost after returning from Peru.

The rubber band that must have held those papers together for nearly a quarter of a century disintegrated when I touched it. A lined, yellowed sheet from a five by eight notepad, folded in quarters, caught my eye. I recognized my handwriting even though the pencil-written words scrawled on both sides were large and rushed, compared to my usual spare, cautious hand. The note to my parents, dated September 25, 1963, about two weeks after I returned from Peru, might have been written by a terrified, lonely, desperate young child, sent away to a school for wayward girls. In fact, on September 25, 1963, I was only a few weeks shy of my 21st birthday and had persuaded an attendant to smuggle the letter out of the mental hospital.

"Dear Folks, I don't belong here—my mind is being hurt—this place is full of old battle axes. I don't need shock treatment and that's what they're giving me—instead of helping me, they are driving me crazy.

My head always aches and the people here bother me. At least you might

come to visit me. Tell me what's happening with Danny and if I've gotten any mail from my Peruvian friends. I can't even remember their names anymore. I'm never permitted to have any privileges. No fork, no knife to eat with. I'm not even allowed to mail this. I have a doctor I dislike and I can't remember even how I got here. All I know is that if I am really sick, I'd rather be home.

At least you could come visit me- Love, Arlene"

I also found a carbon copy of a list of clothing worn by the "New Admission: Eisen, Arlene," who arrived at 10PM on September 13, 1963. The "control sheet" noted the New Admission was allowed to retain a carton of Marlboro cigarettes, a toothbrush, toothpaste and deodorant. The following items were contraband and sent home: "tampons, belts and one tube of makeup, Revlon." As I studied the list, I saw myself standing in a doorless bathroom stall, bloodstained panties around my ankles, yelling for Alma, the hospital attendant. She came quickly with a sanitary napkin. Only patients who progressed to a certain level of mental health were granted the privilege of inserting their own Tampax. I shuddered.

At the bottom of the pile were invoices that meticulously recorded the number of ECT and ICT[5] treatments they had given me. Involuntarily, I pressed my fingers hard against my temples, against the memory of that torture. Ignoring my tears, I calculated that during the 12 short days that passed between the night I was dragged to South Oaks trussed up in a restraining coat and writhing in the back of a padded "limousine," and the time I wrote that note, I had received seven electric shock treatments. That was enough to obliterate my photographic memory that my mother used to brag about. It was more than enough shock treatments to rip away any comfort I might once have had in my own skin. That was only the first stage of "treatment."

My parents told me I had lost touch with reality on the plane headed back to New York from Lima. At first, I thought I knew better than my parents, who had summoned the plainclothes hospital attendants to kidnap and drag me off to the hospital. I had a logical explanation for what might have appeared to be bizarre behavior. I was only frightened and

5 ECT is Electro-Convulsive Therapy and ICT is Insulin Coma Therapy.

desperate to find a way to protect my revolutionary comrades in Peru. My resistance to betraying Carlos and his comrades began on that long Pan American flight: alone, on the plane, somewhere after the plane refueled in Barranquilla, Colombia, but well before it landed at Idlewild Airport only a few miles drive from my parents' home.

Once I arrived at my parents' house, according to family legend, I refused to sleep, eat, drink or talk for three days. I remember thinking that any food or drink might contain some type of truth serum. I was also too nauseous to eat. If I answered any questions, they might use my words against me. Or, even worse: if I slipped and said anything about Carlos and his comrades in Peru, I might be responsible for their imprisonment, torture, even death. My worried parents summoned the family doctor. Kindly Doctor Caso, a stocky bald man who, since I was eight, had treated me for ear aches, chicken pox and other childhood diseases. He assured my parents that I'd be fine, after some rest. He gave me a shot. "To help you sleep, dear," he said, as he patted my punctured butt with an alcohol pad.

I smiled and nodded but was sure it was some type of truth serum. I forced myself to stay awake so I would not reveal the secrets Carlos had shared with me. Alone in my old room, sitting on a large ottoman, I stared out the window, frozen in fear. As my mother turned the knob, I quickly collapsed onto my side and curled into a ball. I had hoped she would think I was sleeping and leave me alone. She stood there studying me. Did I keep my eyes open when I was pretending to sleep? I don't know.

I heard her call to my father, on the other side of the door.

"Jack, I don't think the shot is working. She's just lying there in a ball, staring, not moving, but definitely not sleeping. She looks tense. Strange."

"Sylvia, calm down. She'll be all right. Anyway, the Doc said he gave her enough thorazine to knock out a horse."

Maybe I dozed, but not for long.

According to the family saga, when my father tried to force me to eat, rather than ingest any suspect substance, I punched out two of his

front teeth. When my mother coaxed me to take a shower, to avoid the poison gas I was sure would come from the shower head, I threw dishes and threatened to kill her. Finally, after another consultation with Dr. Caso, they arranged for a "limousine attended by trained personnel in street clothes" to transport me to South Oaks, a "fully accredited psychiatric hospital." But first, my mother made sure that my student health insurance would pay for the costly private facility.

They tell me I quickly gained notoriety among hospital staff and fellow patients for vicious cursing and violent defiance. They tell me that I tore up many sheets, punched a psychiatrist and threatened various attendants. I remember none of this. When I allow it, my body still remembers the pressure of the heavy canvas sheet and ropes used to restrain me each night. I don't remember how long I was confined before I realized that I *was* confined—a prisoner in some kind of facility that would torture me until I divulged the plans of the newly founded *Movimiento de la Izquierda Revolucionaria* in Peru.

How many shock treatments did I have before I forgot my reason for resisting sleep, food and water? How long before I surrendered to the CIA agents who I was sure had kidnapped, imprisoned and tortured me? How long before I forgot the reason why the CIA might have any interest in me at all? How long before I forgot what the CIA even was? Not long. The note from my mother's night table implied that within the first 12 days, I began to believe I "might be sick." Still until my discharge five months later, no one ever convinced me of the therapeutic benefits of shock treatment or hospitalization itself.

At first, I tried to convince them I was an innocent cultural anthropology student, recently returned from the Andes where I had participated in a university-sponsored research project. By November, around the time I watched the Kennedy assassination in the day room, at least 25 electric shock treatments had erased any memory I had of Carlos or Peru. Fellow patients, veterans of the treatments, warned me that I would forget my most recent experiences first. As the number of treatments mounted, my memory loss would extend further and further back.

I feigned compliance. Became docile to convince them I was a "good girl" and no longer deserved the punishment of shock treatment. Even

so, invariably, I was on the list of those denied breakfast—a sure sign that they would soon strap me to a gurney, wheel me into a room with a glaring light beaming down, stuff a hard rubber block in my mouth that made me gag and zap me until I blacked out. When I woke from the blankness, there was only confusion and a stabbing headache. No matter how well I thought I was behaving, the shocks continued. Terror. Sometimes twice a day. Years later when I found those bills in my mother's night table drawer, I learned that they had given me two shock treatments on my 21st birthday, Nov. 4, 1963.

All the patients knew that shock treatment had one result—the obliteration of our memories—and one purpose—to turn us into compliant vegetables. We all dreaded the fate of Charlotte, a tall, large-boned woman. She might have been mistaken for a retired football player except for her thin straight gray hair that was always arranged incongruously in childish pigtails. She sat mute, rocking and grinning, day in and day out. Surgeons had performed her lobotomy. We knew that some years earlier, the modern doctors of South Oaks had abandoned the surgical lobotomy in favor of the bloodless electrical destruction of our brains.

After a while, I no longer strained to remember my life before South Oaks. It was fruitless. I had no capacity to remember any event before the gurney trip into the glare of oblivion. I knew they had stolen my past, but I didn't care. Yet, somewhere in the muddle that blurred the boundaries between terror and resignation, I resolved to defend myself against my psychiatrist. Doctor Edward H. Malone—a scion of the Irish aristocracy of Boston, with very blue eyes and a flirtatious smile that seduced untold numbers of nurses and patients—was convinced that my breakdown was caused by my "unconventional" political and sexual choices. Now that the shocks he prescribed had run their course, he thought I would be malleable and submit to his plan to reprogram my temperament, sexuality, intellect and outrage at injustice.

By then, I had a roommate and confidante. Marsha was only 19, a tall, beautiful redhead with deep green eyes and a model's smile. "Can I bum a cigarette?" she asked as she arranged her stuff in our room. "Sure, wait a sec." I reached for the extra pack of Marlboros my mother had smuggled in for me. As a chain-smoker herself, my mother found my pleas for extra cigarettes irresistible. I had wrapped the contraband into

the large hem of the sheet and stuffed the package into the springs on the underside of the bed. I had just finished the last of the daily ration of ten cigarettes, so it took me some time to extract one from the underside of my bed. As Marsha paced in the small space around the perimeter of our beds, I asked, "What you here for?"

"Nothin'. I shouldn't be here."

"Me neither. But my parents say I did a lot of crazy things." I asserted and hoped she would believe me. She smiled and nodded thanks as I finally handed her a cigarette. She stuck her head into the corridor and called for the hospital aide to light her cigarette. Someone must have been passing at the time, because in a second, her head was back in our room with a lit cigarette dangling from her lips. She inhaled deeply.

"I hate this shit. Why the hell can't we light our own damn cigarettes!"

I made no attempt to repeat the rationale for every bullshit rule in the hospital. "*It's for your own good. When you're ready you'll be allowed to carry your own damn matches, use a fucking knife to cut your own meat, use a fucking tampon...blah, blah, blah.*"

"God, I hate this place."

"Me too." I echoed. "Do you know how long you'll have to stay?"

I watched her inhale again. I marveled at her beauty and confidence. "It can't be long," she answered.

"Why not?" I pressed as I flopped on the bed, imitating her nonchalance.

She explained, "It's my parents who went crazy. They wigged out and locked me up here because they found out I'm lovers with Richie Havens."

"Richie Havens?" The name was new to me.

"He sings and plays guitar in the Village. I moved in with him a little while ago and made the mistake of visiting my parents when I ran out of bread. When they realized they couldn't talk me out of going back to him, they called the men in white coats."

I tensed with the mention of the very men who had kidnapped me.

I managed a sympathetic nod and muttered, "You mean the men had white coats? I think, in my dream, the ones who grabbed me had no uniforms."

Marsha continued, "I hate my parents. I don't know what freaked them out more—figuring out that their little girl wasn't a virgin or that she loves a Black man. Racist dogs!"

"My parents are fucked up like that too." At last, I had found someone at South Oaks who might really understand me.

"Yeah. Your parents are even worse." Marsha interjected. "At least mine didn't authorize shock treatment for me. That bastard Malone recommended it, but they wouldn't go along."

What a revelation! Until then, I had assumed Doctor Malone was omnipotent—the only hand on the trigger. I vowed then and there that the next time my parents visited, to demand they stop the shock treatment. But, by the time they visited, I forgot my resolve.

In the meantime, Marsha and I worked on a defense against Doctor Malone.

"Each time he asks you a question," she suggested, "tell him you don't remember."

I liked the strategy. He had to believe I had no memory after all the shock treatments and I would protect whatever was left of me, keep myself away from his plans to manipulate me.

He began our next session with something like, "I see you're eating better. Are you enjoying the food?"

I still had enough of my mind left to know. "I can't remember" would be a suspect response. So, I told the truth. "Yes. And I would enjoy it even more if I could sit at the table with the patients who are allowed to use a fork and knife." I thought of asking him about why my pubic hair looked like it had been shaved off. It had just begun to itch. Was it another sort of punishment? Yet, afraid he might be put off by a reference to my pubic region, I decided not to press my luck.

He smiled, scribbled something in his notebook but made no commitment to grant me the "privilege" of feeding myself like an adult. In-

stead, he announced, "Arlene, we've decided to end your ECT. I'm prescribing ICT instead. If you behave yourself, there will be no more ECT."

I jumped out of the chair and moved towards him with the intention of hugging him.

He motioned me to sit down. During our sessions, regardless of my resolve to maintain my dignity, or at least presenting myself to him as a calm, composed adult, Malone was an expert in sabotaging my effort.

My elation at the possibility that I'd have no more electro-shock torture came to a screeching halt. My mind raced. "What's ICT?"

He was smiling his Cheshire smile. "It's insulin coma therapy."

I slouched, and almost slid off the chair. "Coma!" I heard. Shock. Now coma. More shock. Next death. Shock by another name, I thought.

"ICT is not like ECT." Malone attempted to comfort me. "It doesn't affect your memory. You drink some medicine, take a nap and then we wake you up, that's all."

At first, compared to electric shock, insulin shock seemed like lying at dusk on a tropical beach. I joined about ten other patients—each of us on a cot in a room with low light. Nurses came around and pricked us gently with the medicine and told us to take a nap. We went for our naps every morning before breakfast. For the first few days, I couldn't fall asleep. I just lay there, bracing myself for some torture, feeling very thirsty, then relieved when nothing came to jolt me. After a while the nurse came around with large paper cups filled with very sweet orange juice. By the end of the first week, they must have increased the dose of the sleeping medicine. The nurse had to shake me awake to drink the orange juice—which tasted much sweeter than at first. My nightgown was drenched with sweat.

The hospital aide, Alma—the only Black staff member I ever saw at South Oaks—was my age. She was a short, curvy, dark-skinned woman with deep brown wide eyes and a shoulder length page-boy hairstyle. She told me about her sisters, her boyfriend and her plans to go to nursing school. Once she asked me, "Why are you here? Your chart says you're a catatonic schizophrenic, but you seem fine to me." I loved her.

After the first week of insulin treatment, I asked Alma about it. "Do you know what it's about? I just sleep and sweat."

Alma explained that the medicine that put us to sleep was insulin. Gradually they would increase our dose of insulin until we went into a coma from lack of sugar. After only a few minutes they would revive us with glucose. They kept the insulin dose high enough to induce a coma daily for a week, then they gradually tapered off. "It's supposed to relax you," she concluded.

She didn't mention how "they gave us glucose" to revive us from the coma when the sweetened orange juice was no longer strong enough to counter the mounting doses of insulin. The next week I found out. They shot the syrup into our veins with a syringe as thick as an icepick. The terror of that syringe replaced the terror of the electrodes at my temples. Soon the vein in my right arm collapsed. Then the left. My wrists. My ankles, my neck. Marsha told me I looked like the desperate junkies she had seen in the Village.

The Doctor, the one who probed our destroyed veins until he found a spot to inject, was short, with a huge paunch and bulging eyes. We ICT patients called him the "pregnant frog." As he poked, prodded and pumped with that monster syringe, I thought I screamed, "Get away from me, you pregnant frog." Later, Alma asked me why I had screamed, "I'm not a pregnant frog."

I shook my head. I had no idea.

Fall passed, Christmas passed, the New Year arrived. Marsha had gone home and a bleak February snow was falling on the day Doctor Malone summoned me to his office. His smile told me he was pleased with himself and maybe with me. For weeks, I had been allowed to cut my own meat, light my own cigarettes and adjust the temperature of the shower. By then I knew better than to abuse those privileges. I acted like a dutiful daughter when my parents took me on brief outings. No attendants or patient snitches could report any escape attempts, wild talk or displays of anger. "Well, Arlene, do you think you're ready to go home?"

I wondered if it was a trick question, but took the risk of answering anyway. "I hope so," I declared evenly and softly, deliberately suppressing my excitement.

Doctor Malone, still smiling, assured me that he too thought I was ready, but with conditions: "I've told your parents that you'll have to live with them for at least six months and that you are not allowed to drive. You must come to see me three times a week. And, I strongly advise you not to get yourself involved in any political or romantic activity—and especially, to stay away from sex. These things may upset you too much."

I nodded in agreement. I would do anything to get out of the hospital. Anything.

The first weekend after my release, Danny Schechter and I arranged to see each other. We had been lovers at Cornell before I went to Peru. Although the shock treatment had erased my memory of our passion, the memory of his weekly visits with me at South Oaks, after I was allowed visiting privileges, was vivid. With the exception of Alma, all hospital attendants, doctors, my parents and even some friends, treated me as if I were incompetent—a freak to fear, a lunatic to control or a child to guide. Only Danny seemed to respect me—even admire me for having survived what he called "incarceration." He quoted Allen Ginsberg and Carl Solomon to convince me that I was "one of the best minds of our generation." He insisted on reminiscing about our classes at Cornell, meetings of the chapter of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) that we had founded and our early dates. He threw me a lifeline to rescue my memory. I clung to it.

❧

That first weekend of my freedom, Danny took me to a meeting in the basement of a church in Harlem. Every folding chair in the low-ceilinged room was taken and still more people lined the side and back walls. Besides us, there were only a couple of white people in the room. Danny and a number of other people wore buttons that said "No rent for rats." No one took off their winter coats.

Malcolm X gave a speech that urged people to join the rent strike. I didn't remember—but Danny reminded me that I had met Malcolm X more than a year earlier when I had helped arrange a lecture by him at Cornell. Regardless of my cloudy memory, during his speech about the rent strike, it was clear that Malcolm's brilliance and love for Black people awed us all.

After the speech, Danny introduced me to Malcolm X.

As Malcolm took my hand, he commented to Danny. "So. This is your sweetheart."

Danny nodded, proud to add, "Yes, and she is also a fighter. They had her locked up for a while, but she's free now." I said nothing.

"Good. Good. We need strong sisters. We'll be meeting again next week, Arlene, I hope to see you here then. In the meantime, I know I can count on Danny X here to get you onto a picket line. It's been a pleasure."

Amazed that this important man treated me like a normal person and thought I could do something useful, I remained speechless. Malcolm X turned to greet another supporter.

After introducing me to a young Black man who wore a Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) button, and another with a button that said Northern Student Movement, Danny guided me out of the church. It was a warm night for February and still early. With his arm around my waist, I didn't need any memory to become aware of the pleasure I felt. Without fear, I kissed him, right there in the middle of 125th Street. "Let's go to Paul's apartment—he's gone for the week and left me his keys," Danny whispered. "Or would you rather I take you back to your parents' house?"

"Are you kidding?" I answered automatically. "Of course, let's go to Paul's." I was too happy to even consider the alternative.

It wasn't until after our lovemaking and after Danny was asleep that I thought about how I had violated Doctor Malone's instructions. Instead of sleeping, all night I interrogated myself: "Am I upset?" "How would I feel if I were upset?" "Why would making love upset me?" I lay awake, anxious, waiting for a psychotic episode to overtake me.

By early morning, I was somewhat relieved that there were no signs of the men in white coats. Still, I had no confidence that I could avoid another crack-up. Two days later, I insisted my mother drop me off early for my appointment with Doctor Malone. Again, I faced the blue-eyed Cheshire smile, and loaded question, "How are you, Arlene?"

Before I could settle into the large leather chair facing his desk, I blurted out my confession. "I'm ok. But I did some bad things. I prom-

ise I won't do that again." I hoped a confession would prevent another crack-up. Malone crinkled the skin around his eyes into a question. At first, I didn't understand that he had no idea of what I was talking about. For months he seemed the omniscient god, knowing and controlling my every move. He paused before he asked me to explain, but he didn't need to probe.

My confession spilled out. "You told me to stay away from politics and sex, but Saturday night I went to a political meeting and then slept with Danny."

"Well, how did doing those things make you feel?" I heard the doctor ask. For the first time, the tone of the doctor's voice made me understand that he was asking me a question that he didn't know the answer to.

"The meeting was great. I learned a lot and met some very interesting people."

I felt myself gaining control and chose my vague words deliberately and carefully. I didn't mention that the meeting was in Harlem or that an important man like Malcolm X thought I might make a contribution. Instead, I added, "I really like Danny. He appreciates me, gives me a feeling that I'm ok—you know, normal. Being in bed with him was fine—except for afterwards when I got scared that I would end up back here in South Oaks."

"So, you enjoyed your weekend?"

"Yes, very much." I answered calmly, as if I were reporting on a routine outing.

"Good. I guess it's safe for you to continue going to meetings and seeing Danny, as long as you keep it to once a week. Don't let things get too intense."

I weighed Doctor Malone's answer. To me it meant I could disobey him and get away with it—at least if I didn't stray too far. As he glanced at his watch, I itemized in my head the rules he had given me, the conditions of my house arrest. I decided, without mentioning it, that for my next act of disobedience, I would borrow my parents' car—just for a short trip to the library. I needed to find some medical information. Then, I smiled to myself and felt confident enough to ask the doctor, "You know, I've

been wondering. Can you tell me why my pubic hair is so short. It's been itching for a while. Is there something wrong?"

Malone shifted his weight. Suddenly he didn't seem comfortable in his leather-covered easy chair. "Yes. I will tell you. A young woman needs to understand her body's changes. Did you know that you were pregnant when you first came to us?"

I focused on the end of his question. *Did he just say, 'when you came to us,' as if I had voluntarily visited an exclusive health spa?* As I suppressed an angry objection to his genteel phrasing, the word *pregnant* broke into my brooding. "Pregnant? Did you say I was pregnant?" My memory stirred with a blurry picture of me standing at the counter of a Peruvian pharmacy in Huaraz. I was asking the clerk for spermicide cream to use with my diaphragm. She had never heard of the stuff. Doctor Malone nodded and waited for my reaction.

"Wow." I sat in amazement, my anger dissolving quickly.

"You had a miscarriage. Many patients miscarry as a result of shock treatment. We administer ECT to stabilize patients who are too labile to function. Miscarriage is an unwanted side effect of the treatment."

"Oh. Really?" My tone was skeptical. I assumed my parents and the doctor would not have wanted this crazy, unmarried woman to have a baby. Besides, how could I have returned to school, much less to Peru, with a baby!

Malone continued. "After the miscarriage, we arranged for you to have a D and C. That's Dilation and Curettage. It's a relatively simple procedure. The physician dilates, that is, widens the cervix so that he can perform the curettage or scrape the inside of the uterus to make sure no tissue from the pregnancy remains."

"You mean I had an abortion?" A vague image of Dolores and her tales of trips to Pittsburgh for illegal abortions, hangers, infections popped into my head. I exhaled hard. That part of my memory had returned.

"You don't have to worry. We arranged for an expert panel of three gynecologists to approve your D and C. It was perfectly legal. And the gynecologist followed all sterilization protocols. In fact, that

is why you were shaved. Now the hair should be almost all back. All very natural."

I laughed. Maybe there was a bit of justice in my ordeal at South Oaks. It was 1963, and I had had a legal abortion without even trying. I left Malone's office that day quickly, but without the anxiety I had brought with me. As I strode to the waiting car, I smiled at my mother, glad she was on time. I had a lot left that I wanted to do that day.[6]

6 Forty years later, as I sipped tea with a friend who was also a clinical psychologist, I mentioned that in my youth I had been committed to a mental hospital with a diagnosis of catatonic schizophrenia. And, although I never had another episode, it was many years before I regained confidence in my sanity and recovered most of my memory. I wondered if my condition was genetic and could be passed on to my children. She was incredulous and demanded the whole story. After hearing me out, she insisted, "You must know you were misdiagnosed...in those days they did not know shit. You made a commitment to Carlos and to his political adventure. You were a kid, in water way over your head. And you were either too naïve or too proud to admit it. You didn't want the Peruvians to think you were a spoiled ugly American or a quitter. Then add your hormonal roller coaster from being pregnant. Your fear took over and may have saved your life." In October 1965, a year after I had planned to return to Peru, the entire membership of the *Movimiento de la Izquierda Revolucionaria* was either killed or captured by the Peruvian Army with the support of the CIA.

Reclaiming (1964)

I returned to Cornell in the fall of 1964, disoriented but determined to make up the year I had lost. Chewing on the cuticle of my right thumb, and rehearsing my proposal, I paced up and down the hallway outside the office of Bill Friedland, my advisor and favorite professor. Friedland refused to conform to any pretense of academic objectivity. He was as proud of his Detroit autoworker roots as he was of his research on African socialism. His was the faculty signature on most left-wing student applications on campus.

I was five minutes early for our appointment but felt like I had been waiting for hours. I checked my watch. 10:09. Did he decide not to come because he had given up on me? Did he know the story behind my leave of absence? He had always told me I was his most brilliant student. He expected me to get a PhD in sociology. At first, I protested.

"But I'm interested in politics. I want to study political science."

"Yes, that's fine. But political scientists accept the political status quo. In sociology, you can study how to make a revolution." We laughed. But that was before Peru and before I left a chunk of my memory on the shock treatment table of South Oaks Psychiatric Hospital.

Finally, Friedland appeared at the end of the hall in his shabby tweed jacket and wrinkled khaki pants. He was balder with a bigger pot belly than I remembered. He extended his arm to shake my hand, but in an instant waved mine away and gave me a bear hug instead.

"It's so good to see you, Arlene. You look great."

I nodded thanks. "Why did he sound surprised?" I wondered. "Did he expect me to have huge bluish black zombie circles under my eyes and singed hair from the shock treatment? Did he think it would show? I hadn't had a treatment in eight or nine months."

"So, Arlene. Tell me what I can do to help."

Relieved that he didn't ask me how my year had been, I explained that with credit for field work in Peru, combined with a few extra units I had earned by the end of my junior year, I figured I would only have to take one extra class to graduate by the end of that semester.

"Six classes. That's a heavy load. Most students kick back and only take four their last semester. Are you sure you don't want to take a year to graduate?"

"I'm sure."

South Oaks had stolen a year of my life. If I could graduate in January, maybe I could regain half of what I had lost. But in truth, I was not sure I could do the work for six classes.

A few days later, I greeted the familiar piles of leaves along the hike from the women's dorm to the academic buildings. I relished crossing Triphammer Bridge high above the beautiful power of the raging waters in the gorge that fed Beebe Lake. When I peered into Noyes Lodge—which had once been like the family kitchen where I could always find a sister or brother sipping coffee—I recognized no one. Everyone I knew—including Danny, had either graduated or dropped out. Imposters, new students who looked too young to be away from home, gave me blank stares. I felt deserted, alarmed at my impending isolation.

I sought refuge in the kitchen of Telluride House. From the outside, Telluride looked like any other mansion converted to a fraternity house. Its members, however, were each carefully selected supposedly for their creativity, brilliance and commitment to service. In exchange for engaging in scintillating conversation—at breakfast, lunch and dinner, members of Telluride were given free room and board. Male members that was.

When I was invited to join Telluride at the end of my junior year, I was part of an experiment that admitted undergraduate women for the

first time. We were allowed to take our meals there, but still had to observe curfew in the women's dorm. Laura Wolfowitz, the older sister of Paul Wolfowitz (now disgraced neo-con architect), and the now-famous Gayatri Chakravorty (Spivak) were the only other women there. Laura ignored me. Gayatri, who was an Indian graduate student in English at the time, treated me kindly, as if she were an older distant cousin. She was an upper caste Brahmin with a fierce commitment to equality. We both shuddered when she talked about the thousands of starving people in India. She recounted how it was impossible not to walk over dead bodies each morning on the streets of Calcutta—those who had died the night before. Other times we giggled as she tried to stretch her sari around my breasts, which were significantly larger than hers.

But that Fall, I was most drawn to another newcomer, Lincoln Bergman. He and I were the only ones who depended on the free meals Telluride offered. All the others came from rich families. I met Lincoln in the hallway, where I had posted an announcement about the first SDS meeting of the semester. A veteran of the sit-ins to force San Francisco hotels to hire Black people, Lincoln was the only one from Telluride who asked me about the meeting and agreed to attend.

Danny was gone, but his legacy to me remained. He had nominated me to be the first president of Cornell's new SDS chapter before I left for Peru. Now, more than a year later, the fledgling chapter still considered me president. I stammered nervously as I assumed the role of chair of that first meeting. "We need to talk about how we're gonna relate to the election. What do you all think?" I scanned the room full of strangers, except for Lincoln. He nodded a smile. I had some ideas about actions we should take, but not the confidence to make any definite proposal. Everyone talked at once. I felt overwhelmed.

Most of them were too young to vote, but everyone seemed to want to take a stand against Barry Goldwater whose stump speech included a promise to bomb North Viet Nam back to the Stone Age. Someone yelled, "But Lyndon Johnson is no better. He manipulated the Gulf of Tonkin Incident to escalate the war." Before I could call on her, someone else yelled, "And he is a Southerner who refused to seat Fannie Lou Hamer and the rest of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party at the Democratic Party Convention last summer."

I had a general understanding that government policies like war and support for Jim Crow reflected something fundamentally wrong with the system. But, I still had a sliver of hope that Johnson would be better than Goldwater—even if he would keep the system intact. "Who has a motion about what we should do?" I yelled slightly louder than the rest. Lincoln nodded, raised his hand, smiled and spoke for the first time. His deep voice gave a radio announcer's authority to whatever he said. "I move we distribute the buttons from the National Office."

The SDS National Office, the N.O., had just mailed 100 buttons to me. The slogan, "Part of the Way with LBJ," stood out on a background of the small white circles, the size of a quarter. I grabbed one of the buttons from the envelope and raised it over my head and then passed it to Lincoln who passed it to the woman sitting next to him.

"I second the motion," she called.

"Any other motions?" I asked.

"Part of the way with LBJ, what does that mean? How far are we willing to go with that bastard? I move we boycott the elections." Everyone started yelling again.

"Please," I yelled, feeling almost giddy that I had recovered enough confidence to exercise my New York assertiveness. "We need to vote on the motions. But before we do, I want to say that I think we should wear the buttons and ask the N.O. to send more. I like that the button doesn't say how far we'll go with him. It's a good way to start conversations with people. To organize them against the war and segregation."

Our motion passed by a landslide—14 to 3. Lincoln and I made a good team during the meeting, I thought. But after the meeting there was no time to speak to him. I raced back to the dorm in time for curfew.

❧

During most days back at Telluride, Lincoln and I both gravitated to Frances Perkins. Madame Perkins—FDR's Secretary of Labor and the first woman cabinet member—made her home at Telluride. At 84, with her narrow back hunched and her wispy white hair, she seemed permanently perched on the only padded chair in the kitchen. Early in the morning, late at night and whenever I needed a break from research into

my Peru field notes, I found Madame Perkins in the kitchen, in animated conversation with the cooks and a dishwasher named Paul Epstein. She had no patience for the young men upstairs who she predicted would become the presidential advisors of the future. Soon, Lincoln, Madame Perkins and I became a threesome, along with the kitchen staff, engrossed in discussions of civil rights, the new war in Viet Nam, women's rights and Lyndon Baines Johnson.

When I met Lincoln, I felt no spark of physical attraction. He was two years younger than me, pale, lean—almost skinny—and only a couple of inches taller than me. Thick horn-rimmed glasses distracted me from his thoughtful eyes and frequent smile. Although he came from a long line of Communists and artists and had already been arrested in a sit-in to integrate jobs at the Sheraton Palace Hotel in San Francisco, I had no interest in him as a romantic partner.

Instead, I found myself in bed with another Telluride outsider—Kostis—a charismatic Greek graduate student who expected, when he returned to Greece, to be appointed Minister of the Economy in a socialist government. After a brief, disappointing affair with Kostis, Lincoln remained as a confidante. Ithaca's snow came early. To avoid the icy paths and frigid temperatures, I spent most of my time at Telluride. And more and more of that time, I spent with Lincoln. He prodded me to talk about Peru and South Oaks, my parents and plans. In his deep calming voice he offered unconditional support. As soon as I dropped off my books and coat in the women's room at Telluride, I checked the kitchen, the library and finally his room—immediately relieved when I heard his voice.

"Hey, Arlene, got plans for the Telluride dance tomorrow?"

I answered honestly. "I forgot about it." He didn't try to hide his disappointment.

"I was hoping you'd go. I wanted to see if you could keep up with my San Francisco moves. I made sure the entertainment committee bought 'Sam Cooke's Latest Hits.'"

Without much interest, I conceded, "Oh, in that case, sure. I love Sam Cooke."

I spent the whole day alone in the women's study room of Telluride hunched over the typewriter trying to finish a report for Professor Friedland. The report writing, by hand, on a legal yellow pad had flowed. The report typing dragged on and on. Even though the manual Smith Corona portable was new, my fingers grew stiff and hands ached from pounding the keys hard enough to make an impression on the third carbon copy. It took longer for me to insert the footnotes by hand and to make each correction in triplicate than it did to write the original.

After daylight disappeared, someone knocked on the door. Afraid that I might forget a complicated idea I had just reformulated, I finished the paragraph I was typing before I answered the door. It was Lincoln. "It's almost dinner time. You wanna eat? There won't be much food at the party."

"Party? What party?"

"Sam Cooke, remember?"

"Sorry Linc, I don't think I can make it. I gotta finish this report and besides, the Telluride boys will be pissed off if I go to their party in these slacks. There's no time for me to go back to the dorm to change."

"You look fine. If they hassle you, I'll protect you."

I gave him a skeptical look and glanced at the pile of index cards on the floor.

"No really, it's about time they gave up their male chauvinism anyway."

"What are you talking about?" I demanded. I remembered the word "chauvinism" from my class in *Diplomatic History of the US*, but never heard it applied to males.

Lincoln hesitated, like he wasn't sure what my question meant. "I'm talking about male chauvinism."

I shrugged. "And?"

"You mean you don't know what it is?" Lincoln sounded incredulous.

"So tell me."

He might have been hiding his impatience, but he explained, "Male chauvinism is an ideology that says that men are superior to women, that women are men's property, that men must control women. It's where double standards come from. Like men can wear pants to parties but women can't."

"Mmmmm." Fascinated, but suspicious this was some intellectual game, I asked him, "And where did you hear about that?"

Lincoln smiled and paused, trying to remember. "I guess from my mother. She used to scold my father, 'don't be such a male chauvinist.' Once she even threatened to report him to the Party's Central Committee for his male chauvinism."

Intrigued, it was my turn to tease him. "So first you offer to protect me like a knight in shining armor and then you declare your opposition to male chauvinism. It seems like you're trying to play it both ways."

"Got me there, Arlene." He smiled again.

Damn, I thought. He is good natured, so stable. I've never seen him lose his cool, and his ideas are really interesting. Maybe I'll just skip dinner, work some more on this report and meet him later at the party.

The party was scheduled for eight. Ever since I can remember, working with the specter of a deadline vastly improved my focus and efficiency. I finished proofreading just as Lincoln knocked. By the time we climbed down the steps to the mansion's living room, most of the members were already there. They stood in small circles with their dates, sipping from their sherry glasses, chatting and nodding their heads to the Beatles' beat. No one was dancing.

"Oh Lincoln, this is gonna be another one of those Telluride parties. A drag. The Beatles are boring."

"Hold on, Arlene. Give it a chance." He ushered me to the corner where the stereo sat, surrounded by alphabetized shelves of classical music. A whole shelf of Bach, another of Beethoven. A pile of Beatles, Chubby Checker and anthologies of unpopular rock 'n roll songs sat on top of the shelf. No Sam Cooke in sight. "Where's Sam Cooke?" I demanded, playfully, but some impatience crept into my voice.

"Right where he should be, in order with the other great musicians." Lincoln's eyes sparkled behind his glasses.

I scanned the shelf, squinting at the spine of each LP: Bizet, Cage and right there, nestled between Chopin and Debussy stood two of Cooke's albums: "Sam Cooke's Greatest Hits" and a brand new one I hadn't seen before called "Ain't That Good News". I laughed. "Lincoln, were you trying to hide these?"

"Not from you. I just didn't want anyone taking them for their personal collection before we had a chance to dance to them." He picked the needle up off the Beatles record and a chorus of groans rose from the sherry drinkers.

"Cool it," Lincoln yelled back. "I'm the new DJ. If you all don't like this, then fire me." And he carefully cued the needle to "You Send Me."

"Shall we?" he made an exaggerated bow.

I glanced towards the sherry drinkers. Paul Wolfowitz and his date—who appeared to be an eighteen-year-old, feminized mirror image of him, pale, with limp black hair, thick glasses and a chin cocked upwards as if judging the rest of us—had begun moving side to side. At least a foot of air stagnated between them.

"Darlin' you send me, honest you do, honest you do, honest you do." Sam Cooke's silky love songs had inspired my slow dancing since high school. "C'mon let's dance."

I nodded and let Lincoln pull me towards him. He left no space between his chest and mine. I rested my head on the softness of his orlon sweater. He didn't own a suit. We stayed in the corner of the room, swaying. His chest felt warm, protective, no longer skinny. He had told me he practiced boxing in high school. I thought I could feel the ridge of the chest muscle he must have developed during boxers' training. The song ended sooner than I wanted.

Then, we were swaying again to Sam Cooke's, "I was born by the river, in a little tent. And just like the river, I've been running ever since."

No one sang poetry like Sam Cooke, I thought. And, with this new song, he went so much deeper than a simple love song. The music and the rub of Lincoln's thigh against my pelvis stirred heat between my legs.

Before the end of the song, I knew Lincoln and I would become lovers. "Why wait?" I thought, when he suggested we go upstairs.

"Where can we go? The women's room has no bed and your room has no privacy."

Fortunately, Lincoln was prepared. "There's privacy in the attic."

The dusty staircase that rose from the third floor to the attic did not appear to have been used for years. The light bulb was burned out. Lincoln held his lit zippo in one hand and guided me with his free hand. I had never explored the third floor of the mansion, let alone the attic.

Lincoln held the lighter high enough for us to navigate the beams until we came to an alcove where a tangle of wires and insulation poked out from under a slab of plywood as large as a double bed. Someone had arranged a couple of layers of sleeping bags on top of the plywood, and left a pile of pillows and an empty chianti bottle with a candle. Perfect. Heat rose from the floor and the sleeping bags protected us from the winter draft blowing through the roof.

In the weeks that followed, Lincoln and I met almost nightly in that attic. Our lovemaking was comfortable, a continuation of our conversations. As our friendship deepened, so did the intimacy of our sex. What he lacked in the charisma and excitement of my older foreign lovers, he made up for in gentleness and his promise of safety and stability. My escape from South Oaks was only months old. I decided Lincoln would be good for me.

❧

That fall, news from the student revolt in Berkeley, California inspired our small band of Cornell radicals. Our SDS chapter collected signatures on a petition to support the Free Speech Movement in Berkeley. We also talked about starting a campaign for better housing in the Ithaca ghetto. I knew very little about how Black people lived in Ithaca. Cornell loomed on a hill far above the city of Ithaca. I rarely had a reason to go to Ithaca—except to see a movie. During my first three years at Cornell, friends took me to the Black part of town only twice. Once was for a birthday party of the Black man who tended bar at our favorite College-town tavern.

The second was for a meeting in a Black Minister's house about nuclear disarmament. Although the meeting had been called to build support for a petition against nuclear testing, the conversation repeatedly shifted to the drama of the civil rights struggle in the South. It was sometime in February 1963 shortly after, Alabama's new governor, George Wallace yelled, "Segregation now, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever!" during his inaugural speech. A few months later Martin Luther King sent his famous letter from a Birmingham jail and Bull Connor attacked Black children with fire hoses.

Minister Williams gently had suggested that Ithaca was not so much different from Birmingham. "My friends, you know, there's segregation in Ithaca too. White people are always welcome at my home, in my neighborhood, but I have never been invited to the home of a white person. And we—not me, my wife, kids—no Negroes are safe in the white sections of Ithaca."

One of the white students, Craig Watson, offered an apology to the Minister.

"That's awful. We are all human beings. You dress, talk and act just like us. You should be allowed to go wherever you choose."

Minister Williams smiled, but did not nod his agreement. "Mr. Watson, by 'us' I assume you mean white people?"

"Yes, of course."

Minister Williams pressed on. "If we're all human—whites, Negroes, Spanish, Asian people, Indian people—then it should not be up to white people to set the standards for what is human. We should all have the same rights regardless of how we talk, dress, act or think."

Craig leapt to his own defense.

"I didn't mean to say that only white people are human. I think you're being too sensitive. You must know what I meant to say."

Mrs. Williams, the Minister's wife, touched her husband's arm as he was about to respond to Craig. Taking advantage of the momentary pause, she held Craig in her gaze and then scanned the rest of us there from the campus. I felt miserable. I didn't want Mr. and Mrs.

Williams to think I was like Craig, but I wasn't sure how I could be different.

"Craig, we know you believe all people are human," Mrs. Williams patiently explained. "Of course you do, dear. But, in truth, if you look into your heart of hearts, you'll agree that white people don't think of themselves as white unless they're in the presence of Negroes or other colored people. It's the privilege of being white that being white is not an issue."

Craig grimaced. His doubt sucked the air from the room.

Mrs. Williams continued. "I mean, in this country, white is what's 'normal.' So when you read a newspaper or have a conversation with other white people, no one has to say, 'a white man was elected, a white man was caught robbing the store...' It is just assumed a man is white unless someone says different."

My thoughts raced. I didn't speak. In my own heart of hearts I knew I was white, and I also knew that I never thought about it until I was "in the presence of Negroes." After that day, I realized my support for integration would never be enough. I also knew that white people had no business trying to "help" Black people. We had too much to learn.

Months after that meeting in Ithaca, I had heard Malcolm X challenge the assumption that white people knew what was best for Black people. America was "sick" with the hypocrisy of white liberals and racism, Malcolm emphasized. "Everything you have devised to solve the race problem has been hypocrisy." I remembered he smiled as he announced to his 99% white audience. It was time for America to listen to the Black masses who wanted the dignity that came from freedom, justice and equality, not from integration. Although I winced at his frequent references to God and the "Honorable Elijah Muhammad," there was no way to argue with his basic message. "The American dream for us is an American nightmare." So, in our first SDS meeting after Lyndon B. Johnson was elected to his own term, I argued against any do-gooder project in the Ithaca ghetto.

Besides, I would be leaving Ithaca soon anyway. By the time the semester came to an end and I prepared to begin Columbia graduate school in New York City, Lincoln and I decided to try to maintain our relationship despite our physical separation.

Not "Me Too" (1965)

Before winter break was over, I arrived with my two suitcases of clothes and three cartons of books and papers at the crowded Upper West Side apartment of Angel Flemings, my friend from Cornell, and two of her friends. None of us were happy about me squeezing my stuff into the only bedroom. Yet, with only work and loans to pay for graduate school at Columbia, we all needed to make rent as cheap as possible.

After the awesome gorges, hills and tree-lined paths of Cornell's campus, the drabness of Columbia's gray stone buildings and cement walks closed in on me. The people passed with their heads bent down against the cold. No one made eye contact, let alone smiled. The triumphant smiles beaming from news photos of students in Berkeley, California who had recently taken over their campus, were much too far away.

Yet I had chosen Columbia over Berkeley because a world-famous sociologist at Columbia had offered me a research job in the most-respected sociology department in the country. As I navigated the poorly lit staircase and hallway of the building that housed his office, I might as well have been climbing into a medieval dungeon tower. I knocked on his door several times before he opened it.

"Yes." He looked at me blankly. "Who do you want to see?"

"You." I blurted. Professor E. looked both younger and shorter than I remembered him. His thick, wavy, dark hair, head cocked to the side and bemused smile made him look like a Jewish mother's favored teenaged son. His European-like accent and finely tailored suit lent him a sophistication that belied his boyish good looks. Yet, his eyes betrayed an arro-

gance that matched his exalted status as a leading scholar in his field and one of the youngest full professors ever appointed to Columbia's faculty. He glanced down at his appointment book. He must have seen my name written there.

"I'm Arlene Eisen. We have an appointment for 11AM. Sorry. I may be a couple of minutes early." I still found it hard to believe that he didn't remember meeting me only five or six weeks earlier.

"I see. Well, come on in. Let me take your coat."

As I released my hair from the wool scarf, unbuttoned my heavy peacoat, and dropped it on a straight back chair, I frowned at the thought that it might be necessary to remind this busy man that he had offered me a job. "Professor, I know you meet a lot of students, so you may not remember me. I met you less than two months ago at Cornell, at a Telluride House reception after your lecture on political reunification." He still looked at me blankly. I pressed on. "We talked about my research in Peru and I asked you about the role trade unions play in political unification. You said it was a very important question that needed more research."

Still his eyes showed no recognition or even interest. I pressed on.

"When I told you that I had applied to study political sociology at Columbia and UC Berkeley, you insisted that Columbia was the best place to study political sociology and, if I came here, I could be your graduate research assistant. You would assign me to answer my own question about trade unions."

When he realized that I noticed him staring at my breasts, he frowned and looked down again at his appointment book. He cleared his throat. "I'm sorry. I don't remember. You know I meet so many people when I'm on the road, Arlene. You did say your name is Arlene? Am I correct? I should remember, however, because most of the students I meet are nowhere as beautiful as you."

I had no idea how to answer him. Was he paying me an innocent compliment or baiting the trap of a man on the hunt? I didn't want to insult him by assuming he was so crude as to make a pass at me. Still, his gaze made me think that maybe I should have worn a looser sweater. I scanned the office, attempting to avoid meeting his eyes. On his desk,

I noticed the framed image of him and a woman. I glanced at the open door thinking, "He wouldn't dare touch me. Somebody might see him and tell his wife." I decided to ignore both the sinking feeling in my stomach and his comment. I shouldn't jump to the wrong conclusion, I scolded myself. Surely if I mentioned that Bill Friedland had recommended me, he would realize I was a serious student. I continued, "You must have received a letter from Bill Friedland about me."

He glanced at an unruly pile of unopened envelopes at the far corner of his desk, and lightly brushed my breasts as he reached to slam the door closed. I tried to convince myself his touch was an accident. Even so, but I knew better. The knot in my stomach tightened. I took a step back and bumped into the edge of an open file drawer. My forehead furrowed—in pain.

"Oh, be careful." He was suddenly concerned. "This office is really too small for two—unless of course, they are close." His smile made me shiver. He continued. "If I hire you, you'll have to work here, with me, in this office. I need my assistants close by." He cupped my shoulder in his hand and squeezed. Then, as he leaned into me, he almost whispered, "Do you understand?"

That was it. I decided there was no way I could convince him to leave me alone and give me a job. The outrage and disappointment that had settled in my stomach surged towards my chest and arms. The urge to punch him nearly overpowered me. Instead, I managed to reach for the doorknob. "Professor E., I think you must have me confused with someone else. I better go now." Shaking, I turned the knob, but it didn't move. He smiled again, apparently proud of himself for trapping me with so little effort.

With a voice that threatened to scream, I part-pleaded, part-ordered him, "Unlock the door, now…please."

His smug smile disappeared, he rolled his eyes, shrugged and turned the knob on the top lock counterclockwise and the bottom lock clockwise, and made an exaggerated bow as he opened the door. I bolted, just in case he changed his mind.

I rushed down the stairs and out into the winter air. Snow had started to fall. Shivering, I realized that I had left my coat and scarf on the chair

in Professor E's office. There was no way I would return to that creep's office. "To hell with the coat." I ignored the stares as I ran, in my favorite red mohair cardigan past the steps of Butler Library toward the gate that opened onto Broadway and the safety of New York City's streets. Four blocks later, panting and shaking, I banged on our apartment door. I still didn't have my own set of keys. I heard the peephole click and gratefully nodded to Angel's alarmed, bronze-colored face.

"Girl, what the hell happened to you?"

I ignored her question and made a bee-line for the bedroom, pulled off the soggy mohair sweater, grabbed a blanket, wrapped myself in it baby-bunting style and collapsed on the edge of my cot. She followed me. "Are you ok? Tell me what's going on."

"I don't know. I don't know if..." I could not go on. I realized I wasn't sure if I had just escaped from a rapist's trap or stupidly ruined my chance for financial support for graduate study for no good reason. "I can't talk about it now, Angel. Don't worry. I'll be ok after I warm up."

"Where's your coat?"

"That's a long story. I'll tell you in a minute."

"You want something hot? Tea? Coffee? I could open a can of soup?"

"Angel, don't you have that qualification test this afternoon? Don't let me take your study time. I'll be fine."

Angel shrugged and went back to her notes which were strewn over the kitchen table. I curled up in a ball on my bed. I hated myself. "I really fucked up this time, I brooded. Why the hell did I choose Columbia! So what if it has a great reputation? So what if it's near Lincoln?" Then I remembered that I was supposed to go to the Financial Aid Office after my meeting with Professor E. I needed to apply for an emergency loan so I could make a tuition payment on time. Now that I couldn't work for Professor E, I needed to recalculate the loan request. I added and re-added my expenses. If I cut down to two meals a day, only bought used books and stopped smoking, maybe...Professor E's smirk glared back from the page. Damn! How many years would I need to pay off such a loan?

Help from my parents was out of the question. A few months earlier at Thanksgiving dinner, when I first announced I wanted to study sociol-

ogy in graduate school, my father's lips narrowed into a sneer. "It would be a lot cheaper for you just to find a husband with a decent income."

For the hundredth time I insisted: "I don't intend to sell myself to anyone. If I ever marry, my husband will respect my independence." My mother intervened. "I can understand you want your independence, dear. What else is new? But if you're going to be independent, you'll need job security. Be practical. Teaching and nursing jobs are easy for a woman to come by, I don't know about jobs for sociologists."

My eyes welled up. I hated myself for hoping that just that one time, they might back me up. "But I don't want to be a nurse or..." My father interrupted.

"Nurse, smirsh. Sylvia, I don't give a shit what your daughter wants to be. I ain't paying another cent for her education. It's throwing good money down a rat hole. If she wants money, she should come to work for me in the button business."

The phone ringing in the kitchen interrupted the memory of my parents. I heard Angel's "Just a minute please." And then she appeared at the bedroom door,

"Someone from California is calling long distance for you. He says his name is John Leggett. He says it's urgent." Without excitement, I moved quickly towards the phone, not wanting to be the cause of an expensive long distance phone call. "John Leggett. John Leggett. Who the hell is John Leggett?" Then I remembered. John Leggett and Professor Friedland were old friends who met in Detroit when they were both in the United Auto Workers. Later, they both got their PhDs in sociology. A few days before I left Cornell, Friedland had invited me to dinner to meet Leggett who was teaching in Berkeley. Leggett spent the whole dinner regaling us with stories about his arrest during the Free Speech Movement sit-in a few weeks earlier.

"Hello?"

"Hello, John Leggett here. Is this Arlene Eisen I'm speaking to? Bill Friedland gave me this number but he wasn't sure it was the right one."

"You got me. How are you?" I tried to sound calm, mature, intelligent.

"I'm in trouble, but I think you can help me."

Now I pictured Leggett across Friedland's dinner table. He had a spikey blond crew cut, wore a "Free Speech Movement" t-shirt. He talked fast then and he was talking fast now.

"The Chairman of the Sociology Department gives me no respect. He assigned me to teach Sociology 101 at the last minute. Classes start next week and I only have two TAs with 125 students already enrolled. I need at least one more teaching assistant. And, I want to make sure all my TAs are cool politically, you know what I mean?"

"I guess so." My mind raced to the comments scrawled in red ink on my freshman term paper about the Wobblies. *You've done a lot of research. But it's useless if you can't be objective. You need to curb your sympathy for a bunch of anarchists.*

"Friedland told me you decided to go to Columbia. Arlene, do you know how reactionary those Columbia sociologists are? I thought you were cool."

I fought the urge to defend my choice, and for the second time that day, I couldn't think of the right thing to say.

"Arlene, are you still there?"

"Yes. I'm here." I glanced at Angel who made no attempt to hide her curiosity.

"Good, listen," his tone became gentler, more serious. "I called because I hope I can convince you to come to Cal. You'll learn more about political sociology in a week of movement meetings here than you can learn from a semester of work with E."

I winced at the mention of Professor E. "Professor Leggett, maybe you're right, but it's too late. I already signed up for classes and paid rent here, first and last month." Angel nodded.

"Arlene, first, call me John. Second, all universities allow students to drop classes at the beginning of the term. Third, if you're a teaching assistant at Cal, you get free tuition and a stipend that will pay for all your living expenses with a little left over for one or two plane trips home a year."

"Professor Leggett, I mean John, are you serious? Do you mean I could get a PhD at Cal without going into debt?"

"Of course, I'm serious. But you got to get on a plane right away. You've already missed our first TA meeting. That's ok. But you can't miss the first day of classes."

I was used to making lists of pros and cons every time I made an important decision. Then, once I made a decision, I'd make more lists of things I had to do to make the decision work. This time there was nothing to list or plan. Professors E and Leggett made the decision for me.

"Well, Arlene, what do ya say?"

It felt like someone else spoke for me into the phone.

"Yes. Yes. I'll come. Yes. Thank you. Thank you very much."

Then Leggett shifted into an even higher gear. "I think I can get you an extra travel allowance if you can't afford a plane ticket. But it will be quicker if I buy the ticket and you can pay me back later. Let me see what I can arrange. I'll check back with you in a couple of hours."

Two days later I flew away from the slushy streets of New York lined with mounds of dirty snow, and landed on a warm, early spring afternoon in San Francisco. I didn't need a winter coat at all.

Part Two:
California Guerrilla Love
(1965-1969)

Berkeley Baptism (1965)

The day after the plane landed in San Francisco, I stood in the middle of the Plaza that faced the famous Sproul Hall, slowly rotating on an invisible axis, gawking at each table in the bustling political bazaar. "Join the CORE Picket at Oakland Restaurants", "A Free University in a Free Society", "Abolish the Regents", "Get out of Viet Nam Now". I, the New Yorker, knew I looked like a hick visiting Times Square for the first time. And I didn't care. Hundreds of students—mostly white and more Asian people than I had ever seen outside New York Chinatown—clustered in pockets for intense debate, jabbing the air to emphasize their points. Unlike the usual contemplative calm of the campuses I knew, this place throbbed.

At least one or two people sat at each table, nearly hidden behind hand-lettered banners, posters, piles of mimeographed leaflets and petitions. The full political spectrum was represented from Friends of SNCC and SDS on the left to the Young Republicans on the right. I clutched every left leaflet that was thrust in my direction. Soon my purse overflowed with them. I scrawled the time and place of the next SDS meeting on the back of a flyer announcing an anti-war rally and rushed to find the Student Housing Office before it closed.

From a blizzard of index cards on the bulletin board, I soon found a room for rent in a furnished apartment. The dayglo pink poster said it was less than a five-minute walk from campus. Almost giddy, rather than wait in the line at the payphone, I headed back through the crush of people in Sproul Plaza, down Telegraph Avenue. At every corner, I

checked the map. Durant, Channing, then Haste. Bookstores, newspaper and tobacco stands, clothing and shoe stores, and hamburger joints lined Telegraph as they do in any college town strip. But the overlapping layers of leaflets stapled to every pole announcing a Free Speech Movement (FSM) rally the following day and an anti-discrimination picket that weekend screamed that Berkeley was different. It had been only two months since the front pages of newspapers around the world featured the unprecedented spectacle of police dragging 800, mostly white, middle-class university students, down three flights of stairs to break up the FSM's sit-in. It seemed like everyone I passed was proud to display their membership in this new community of militants. Soon, I too would pin a SNCC button on one lapel and a "Get out of Viet Nam" button on the other.

At Haste Street I made a left and quickly found number 2544, a two-story wooden-frame house, painted white. I paused scanning the façade. Someone had nailed a wood panel over the front door and painted it white. I had no choice but to follow the cement path to the rear of the house. There, a sign, "PRIVATE. DO NOT DISTURB," covered the window of the door at the base of a staircase. I obeyed, opened a rusty gate and climbed the creaky wooden staircase to another door that I hoped would be more welcoming.

A tall, lean, and sun-tanned blond woman appeared at the top of the steps. Her hair was long, straight and silky—like in the Breck Shampoo commercials—but rather than cascade down her back, it was neatly parted and bunched in two very long pigtails. I thought of Heidi, from tales of childhood heroism in the Swiss Alps. Before I reached the landing where she stood, I called out. "Are you Carole, the one who's looking for a roommate?" She nodded.

"Good." I paused to catch my breath. "Is the room still available?"

She nodded again.

"Would it be ok if I looked at it now?"

"Yes. I guess so." I hoped she didn't think I was too pushy.

And after a pause, "Come on up. What's your name?"

The door opened onto a tiny, but immaculate kitchen that barely ac-

commodated a table and two chairs. As I squeezed between the refrigerator and table, Carole pointed to a door on her right. "That's my room. The vacant room is through here. Come."

The space that might become my first home in Berkeley must have originally been a utility room. It was narrow and long enough only for a single bed and a small desk that also served as a headboard. The towering antique oak bookcase stood against the wall behind the desk and took up all the remaining space. Yet, the light streaming from a large window and the carvings on the bookcase made the room feel comforting, almost appealing.

Carole motioned for me to sit on the bed. She sat on the edge of the desk. "You're from New York, aren't you?" Of course, she had noticed my accent. Then she smiled for the first time, as if to say she didn't mind that I was from New York, I could admit it.

"Yes, where are you from?" as I wondered if Carole was anti-semitic. She had lowered her voice a notch when she pronounced "New York," the same way Emily did—the woman from Iowa in my freshman dorm who wondered aloud if Jewish people had tails.

"Southern California, the Valley actually." Carole affirmed.

I didn't ask her what valley. "The landlord doesn't allow us to put anything on the walls. He lives downstairs and on the other side of that wall." She nodded in the direction of the bookcase. "So he insists we be very quiet. Absolutely no parties here. I don't care if you bring friends over, as long as they're quiet."

"You don't have to worry about me. I'm new in Berkeley. I hardly know anybody. I'm here for the sociology graduate program. How about you?"

"I'm a Scandinavian Studies major. I'll graduate in June."

Carole's original roommate had skipped out without paying her share of February's rent, so she was relieved that I wanted to move in right away. Strangely, we stood only a stone's throw from the scene of the biggest mass student arrest in history, but we both avoided any conversation about the whirlwind of Berkeley politics. I suspected she was a Republican. I needed a place to sleep immediately and figured I wouldn't be spending much time in that apartment anyway.

In fact, she asked me no personal questions except if I could afford the $37.50 a month rent. And would I please always remember to open and close the downstairs gate quietly so the landlord wouldn't get mad.

"Sure," I responded, delighted to have my own room for half the price I was paying to share one on the Upper West Side of New York. "How soon can I move in?"

The apartment was around the corner from the Mediterranean Café—where they served expresso, lattes and Italian sodas—like the cafes I had loved in Greenwich Village. I had already been to a planning session with Leggett's other teaching assistants at The Med. At our first meeting, Leggett introduced me to them as "the founder of the Cornell Chapter of SDS." I needed no other credentials. I felt, however, like a fraud. Cornell radical politics were child's play compared to the serious, big-time political scene in Berkeley. My fellow TAs were both veterans of Mississippi Freedom Summer and the Sproul Hall sit-in. They nodded mechanically without showing any interest in Cornell's SDS chapter or in me, the only woman at the table.

One of the TAs, Davey Wellman, was short and wiry with a thick horseshoe mustache that extended down the side of his face and dark curly hair which he was proud to explain he had inherited from his Italian mother. His father was a Jewish autoworker, union organizer, Communist and veteran of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade that fought in Spain. In an accent that reminded me of Marlon Brando in *On the Waterfront*, Davey challenged me:

"Whad'ya know about the SNCC Freedom Schools?"

"Not enough." I admitted. Then I followed a hunch and turned the question around.

"Did you teach in Mississippi or Georgia?"

"Mississippi."

I thought about the early morning phone call that alerted Danny that James Chaney, Andrew Goodman and Michael Schwerner were missing and blurted, "That must have been scary." Davey frowned. "Damn," I thought. "What did I say wrong?"

"Whad'ya talking about? Nothing dangerous about the kids we were teaching!"

"Yes, but." I stopped, trying to figure out how to explain myself. "Sure, but wasn't the school…in the heart of Klan country?"

Davey chuckled. "Oh that. Sure. But kids overflowed our school. Kids who didn't care about public school, loved the Freedom School. So their parents protected us. Ya know why our school was so popular? Lemme tell ya why." He emptied his coffee cup in one gulp and continued,

"Because we respected the kids and taught them from a book that they wrote themselves. No way we would try to teach them what we thought they should learn. We gotta take the same approach with our sociology students here. So, Arlene, ya wanna work with me on figuring out how to teach Sociology 101 as if we were in a Freedom School, not the multiversity?"

His voice sounded sarcastic, but again his smile encouraged me.

"Sure." I answered quickly, flattered but afraid he might change his mind once he realized how little I knew.

The other TA, Mike James, was Davey's opposite: tall, hefty, with longish straight blond hair—the son of a successful Broadway producer who was raised in one of the exclusive Protestant towns in Connecticut. His inspiration came from SDS Projects in northern cities that organized poor white and Black people. Yet their shared history in civil rights struggles and as Free Speech Movement arrestees bonded them tightly.

Leggett, Davey and Mike had already agreed that rather than rely on the standard introductory sociology text, we would introduce our students to a study of society that focused on the issue of power. They had decided to assign *The Power Elite* by C. Wright Mills and *The Fire Next Time* by James Baldwin. They liked my suggestion that we also mimeograph and distribute Malcolm X's speech *The Ballot or the Bullet* as well as Mario Savio's speeches from the Free Speech Movement.

Professor Leggett seemed to have more confidence in me than I had in myself. Although I had picked up a smattering of sociology at Cornell, I deliberately never mentioned the fact that I had no formal sociology training. Without either of us acknowledging it, in the guise of teaching me how to teach, Davey gave me a crash course in introductory sociology, and he became my de facto political mentor.

"We're picketing in the Sea Wolf in Oakland this Friday night. Ya wanna come?"

"Sure," I answered without hesitation.

"Don't ya wanna know what we're picketing and why before you decide."

I bit my lip. "Of course. What's the Sea Wolf?"

"One of the classiest restaurants in Jack London Square. Most of the people in Oakland are Black, but they can only get jobs in their own home town cleaning up after white people."

An image of Harlem and the "No Rent for Rats" button that Danny had given me appeared in my head.

"We organized this Ad Hoc Committee Against Discrimination to demand decent jobs. We plan to picket. No way the Sea Wolf's customers will eat in peace, until the owners agree to hire Black people for the front waiter jobs that pay a fair wage. We need as many people as possible on the picket line. The cops will be there in force and Oakland police don't play."

I cleared my throat and nodded, "Cool." I had just committed myself to my first confrontation with the police. If I felt any fear, I didn't admit it to myself, let alone to Davey. I only knew that I had to be part of this movement—the same movement that faced death in the South, the same movement that was making history. I knew a lot about it from Danny, but he had never pressed me to join a picket line. Now, it seemed like it was my time to act on my outrage at discrimination, regardless of the consequences.

I had barely gotten used to the three-hour time difference between New York and Berkeley, when I plunged into a whirlwind of pickets, meetings, rallies, classes and lectures. Invariably, I was one of a tiny handful of women at the political meetings and one of only two women in the sociology graduate program. I had already grown used to being one of the only women in classes at Cornell and at Telluride. Nevertheless, in Berkeley, I did notice that after the business of work or politics was over, the guys never invited me to join them. Invariably, the intensity of any connection I felt during an hour-long confrontation with the police or a

three-hour strategy meeting would fizzle when they would say, "Seeya," instead of "Wanna join us?" Then they marched off together in the direction of Blake's for beer. Alone, I turned towards my apartment.

At the time, I felt hurt that they apparently thought that I wasn't cool enough or smart enough or radical enough to join their inner social circle. It would be years before I understood that each of them had a wife or lover waiting for them at home. They could relate to me as a fellow TA or radical, but had no concept of socializing with a woman who wasn't their bed partner. As a woman raised in the 1950s, it never occurred to me to take the initiative to invite myself to join them at Blake's or anywhere else. Although Leggett allowed his TAs to do whatever we wanted in our own sections, he did insist all his TAs attend his 8AM lecture three mornings a week. After meetings, and preparing to teach the next day, I rarely got more than five hours sleep. Who had time for beer anyway? I consoled myself.

A few days after I arrived, I stood agape among some 5,000 students at my first mass rally. A professor listed the war crimes the US government was committing in our name:

"Our troops—armed to the teeth—tramp through a village where poor peasants live in thatched huts. With their bayonets, they prod people into a field away from their huts. Then they systematically light each hut on fire—while the peasants watch all their worldly possessions go up in smoke. Then they force the villagers to march to 'strategic hamlets'—concentration camps really where supposedly they cannot be infiltrated by the communists. These zippo brigades can never bring democracy to Vietnam...Then there's the napalm our planes drop from the sky..."

As I listened to the professor, horror and hatred surged in my gut. Yet, standing in that crowd of thousands of people, who had begun to chant, "Stop the War Now!" also made me feel a new power. Lyndon Johnson would have to listen to us. I was no longer part of a handful of outcasts being heckled at Cornell. I chanted louder, sure that no government could ignore us.

Monday morning, February 22, I followed what had become my morning routine. On the way to Leggett's lecture, I stopped at the news-

stand to splurge on *The New York Times*. And there on the bottom of page one, a small headline announced, "Malcolm X Shot to Death at Rally Here." I gasped, shuddered and involuntarily howled aloud, "Oh no. Daaaaamn them!"

It was not much more than a year since Malcolm had taken my hand in that church basement in Harlem and invited me to join their picket line. His down-to-earth grace gave me my first sense that I might be useful to the struggle. I knew Malcolm X had done the same for thousands, perhaps millions, of Black people. I tried to explain this to the guy behind the counter.

"You mean that fanatic Negro who preaches all whites are the devil. He had it coming."

Afraid he'd report a ranting woman to the cops, I didn't attempt to answer him. Instead, I called Danny, my old lover who had introduced me to Malcolm. It was 11AM in New York. No one picked up the phone. I was already late for Leggett's lecture. In a huddle at the front of the lecture hall Leggett and the other TAs decided to postpone his lecture on *The Power Elite* to talk about why someone would murder Malcolm X. He turned towards the students who immediately stopped chatting. He told the hushed lecture hall.

"You know, only a month ago Malcolm X gave a speech where he tried to make his listeners aware of the impotence of the American power structure. He said, and I quote, 'If France, with all types of heavy arms, as deeply entrenched as she was in Indochina, couldn't stay there...The complete defeat of the US power structure in South Viet Nam is only a matter of time.' Think about the connection between that speech and the speaker's murder."

Of course, I thought, why hadn't I made that connection myself? I was too busy rehearsing my own, too defensive, lecture on how Malcolm was not a white-hating fanatic. I started scribbling notes for how I would talk to the four sections I was about to teach that week. I would explain how Malcolm had become an enemy of the US government, just the way Lumumba had become too dangerous to the Europeans and Americans in the Congo. Both were murdered. Slandering Malcolm as a "hatemonger" only served to justify the murders.

As I scribbled, I got angrier, and also more certain. Leggett was right. I would learn more about political sociology in Berkeley than I ever could at Columbia. More importantly, I would have a chance to act on what I was learning. Berkeley was definitely the place to be for those of us who hated the system. And with each rally, with each confrontation with the police at those Friday night pickets at Jack London Square, I lost a bit more of the little faith I had left in the system.

Troop Trains (1965)

On a Sunday some weeks after I settled into Berkeley, I finally dialed the number Lincoln had given me for his father, Leibel Bergman. "You'll love my father," Lincoln promised. "And he'll take you to the best Chinese restaurant in San Francisco."

The phone rang many times before Leibel picked it up.

"Hello?" I heard Leibel's Minnesota accent and Paul Robeson singing "Ol' Man River" in the background.

"Hello, this is Arlene."

"Arlene?" He paused and as I debated how I should introduce myself. "Oh, yes, Arlene, Lincoln's sweetheart. He told me you would be calling. Are you in town now?"

"I'm in Berkeley."

"Well, why don't you hop on a bus and come on over. I just cooked a big pot of spaghetti." His ready invitation, that sounded like he already considered me a member of the family, dissolved my anxiety about introductions.

Reluctantly, I explained, "I'd love to, but I've got to do research for a paper that's due soon. Today is the only day I have time to go to the library."

"Oh, what's the paper about?" he wanted to know.

"The Spanish Civil War. Actually, I'm writing two papers on the Spanish Civil War."

"Really?"

"Ever since I read *Homage to Catalonia*, I've been in love with the Spanish Civil War, or at least with the Spanish anarchists..."

He interrupted. "No. Don't tell me that. Don't you know anarchism is a bourgeois ideology?" I also thought I heard him mutter under his breath, "fucking Orwell, the anti-Communist scum."

"Bourgeois ideology?" I stammered. I knew "bourgeois" meant capitalist or rich or something and I was also sure that the Spanish anarchists were a bunch of poor peasants and workers. He didn't mean anarchists were bourgeois. How could he? He tried to convince me:

"Yeah, in Spain and everywhere, those anarchists are nothing but a bunch of bourgeois individualists. They fuck up every revolution they get near. They hate the Soviet Union. Even if they're not rich, each one acts as if they were the only person in the world. They refuse to go along with any group decisions. In the name of freedom, they make unity, even solidarity, impossible. That's the way they serve the bourgeois rulers—the ones who promote the myth of individual freedom, but only really care about their own freedom to make money."

Leibel must have heard my loud sigh and paused, "But don't take my word for it. Do your own research."

I couldn't believe I was on the phone with someone's father. Lincoln had told me his father was a Communist and had to go into hiding during Joseph McCarthy's reign. But fathers-as-serious-revolutionaries had been an abstraction to me until I spoke with Leibel.

"OK," I said, tentatively. I had heard too many heroic stories about him from Lincoln to maintain an automatic dismissal of his claim. Although I was still skeptical, I told him, "I know I have a lot more to learn. Can you recommend something I should read?"

So began my relationship with my boyfriend's father and first Marxist-Leninist tutor.

A few weeks later, I finally met the Bergman family face-to-face. Leibel lived in a cramped in-law apartment in the hills near Glen Park with his daughter Miranda, then a senior in high school and his youngest son, Chris, a rebellious sixteen-year-old who rarely went to school at all.

Anne, their mother, had died a painful death, a martyr to cancer, when Chris was twelve.

A cacophony of activity filled the small apartment. When I arrived, Leibel was clacking away at a cranky typewriter perched on the kitchen table. His huge belly filled so much space between him and the table, he had to stretch his arms rigidly to reach the typewriter keys. Although he was fat and bald, with only a small hem of reddish gray hair circling his freckled head, his biceps were still large and defined, his hands still thick from years of manual labor. A framed black and white drawing of a Black woman holding a baby with her powerfully muscled forearms loomed over the table. A signature was scrawled in the lower right-hand corner, "In solidarity, Charles White."

"Hey Chris," Leibel bellowed. "Show some manners. C'mon meet Lincoln's sweetheart."

I blushed. Chris kept singing along with Odetta, "O Freedom" blasting from the bedroom he shared with his father. I didn't think he heard Leibel.

"Chris!" Leibel repeated, even louder.

This time a skinny teenaged version of Leibel, with a bush of frizzy red hair that reached his shoulders and a teasing grin poked his head into the kitchen.

"Yeah? Oh." He seemed to mock his own surprise and nodded at me. "Do we have company? Just make yourself at home, I'm in the middle of writing a song. Catch ya later."

Leibel frowned but didn't demand he stay.

The rush of air from Chris's door slamming pushed open the bedspread curtain that had filled the threshold between the kitchen and utility porch. I caught a glimpse of a young woman, who had to be Miranda, lying next to a young Black man. They were on a mattress on the floor. I couldn't believe it. This was a family that I was starting to love—a family so unlike my own.

Miranda smoothed out her sweater as she emerged from the porch, holding hands with a dark-skinned man. She had the same moon-shaped face and deep brown eyes as Lincoln. She was beautiful and cute at the

same time with an open smile that revealed a large space between her teeth. Less than five feet tall, she wore a tight-fitting skirt and sweater, high boots and a confidence that came from being the de facto mother and main breadwinner of the family. She worked every night after school as a typist and every weekend as a store clerk.

"Hey, you must be Arlene." She reached for my hand. "Linc told me a lot about you. And this is Jimmy. Sorry, we have to run. Jimmy gotta return the car he borrowed."

I was four years older than Miranda, but that afternoon I felt that she might be my big sister. I was a graduate student and she was barely out of high school, still, I obviously had a lot to learn from her about "the real world." I was disappointed not to be able to spend more time with her that afternoon.

Although McCarthyism was supposedly dead, Leibel could not keep a job for more than a few weeks before an FBI agent tracked him down and pressed his new boss to fire him. Besides, according to Lincoln, Leibel preferred to spend his time writing political position papers to orient new recruits. Ever since he had denounced the Communist Party as hopelessly "revisionist," sold-out, he devoted his time to building a new truly revolutionary organization. As Miranda and Jimmy left, Leibel poked me, "So, have you read that book I told you about?"

Spring 1965—the spring they murdered Malcolm X—the spring some Air Force Commander announced plans to bomb Viet Nam back into the Stone Age; the spring that the whole world saw southern troops savagely turn water canons and attack dogs on peaceful civil rights marchers in Selma, Alabama—I battled with rage against despair.

"I hate this world," I brooded. "I hate my life. What's the point of getting out of bed!"

Yet, each day I did drag myself out of bed, went to class, taught class, went to noon rallies, to evening marches, to endless meetings. Lincoln's letters from Cornell prodded me for news from the Berkeley front—the presumed vanguard of the white student revolution. I typed endless pages of reports without ever mentioning why I hurled myself into this work

instead of "turning on, tuning in and dropping out" as so many were doing. Although I had only a vague sense of how the leaflets, the marches, the lectures would matter, I knew they had to help. I sobbed when I heard reports of beatings and lynchings in the South and napalm burning through Vietnamese peoples' clothes and flesh until only ash remained.

"We have to do more!" I screamed in a letter to Lincoln.

He answered apologetically with accounts of tiny anti-war marches in Ithaca.

In April, I decided to fly east for Spring Break.

"SDS has put out a call. All students must march on Washington April 17, to stop the war in Viet Nam," I wrote to Lincoln. "I'm going. Let's march together."

Lincoln's answer infuriated me. "Our Easter Vacation is over by then. It'll be hard to make it, but you could visit me here and I'll arrange for you to speak about Berkeley at the Cornell Forum."

I couldn't afford the long distance call, but I called him anyway.

"What do you mean, you can't make it?" I screamed into the phone.

Lincoln chuckled. "Whoa. I didn't say I won't go. I just meant to say it'll be difficult. I'll have to miss some classes, but that's ok. Since I wrote that letter there's a lot more activity here. People are really upset about the new bombing. I think we're gonna charter a bus from Ithaca."

I felt relieved, affirmed that Lincoln apparently felt the same urgency I felt. Nearly daily, the number of troops ordered to Viet Nam multiplied. At the beginning of March, we were outraged by a call-up of 3,500 new Marines—the same month the Selma atrocities had us glued to TV screens. By the time my letter from Berkeley arrived in Ithaca, another 10,000 troops descended on Viet Nam. One of them would be Miranda's friend, Jimmy. He was convicted of "joyriding" when he borrowed a relative's car without permission. The judge gave him the choice: two years in prison or two years in the Army. He enlisted.

Lincoln joined me in Berkeley for the summer of 1965, but before we could set up housekeeping together, his father made him an offer he

could not refuse. How could any serious radical turn down an invitation to work in Peking for a year!

I missed an urgent planning meeting of the Viet Nam Day Committee to escalate our protests with new direct action against the war. Instead, I went with Lincoln to San Francisco Airport where he was about to take off with his father on a secret journey to China. His father had arranged for them to teach English at the Foreign Languages Institute in Peking. Their contract required them to work a year, and had an option for renewal.

"Do you really want me to wait a whole year for you?" I whispered my plea as we sat waiting among a gaggle of tourists about to board the plane to London—the first leg of their trip. I never considered trying to dissuade him from going to China. I was thrilled that he had a chance to visit a revolutionary country that hardly any Americans had seen and hoped that once he arrived there, he would be able to arrange for me to join him. "How long will it take for them to invite me?" I realized I was being unreasonable. He had no access to that kind of information.

"Arlene, I don't know. Maybe a month, maybe two or three. But for sure, I'll be back in a year. The contract is for a year."

"And you want me to wait a whole year!"

He took my hand. "Arlene, I want you to do what you want to do. I don't own you. But I promise you that I will be faithful to you. You can be sure I'll come back to you and when I do, if you still want to, we'll be together. Always."

"Always? Really?"

"Yes, really. I'm sure. Trust me. But we don't have much time now. Now let's go over our code."

In those days, it was illegal to travel to the Peoples' Republic of China—so we worked out an elaborate system that included pseudonyms, numbered letters and code words for sensitive subjects. Since I would be mailing letters directly to Peking, it was important that they revealed nothing to the FBI or CIA about the true identity of "Dear Oscar." Most of his letters to me would arrive with postmarks from London, Australia and Hong Kong.

I watched his father light up a new cigarette with the end of the one that he had smoked down to the nub as he paced from one end of the waiting area and back.

"Ladies and Gentlemen, all passengers on flight 266 to London, must board now."

I grabbed Lincoln's arm. For the first time, I realized that all the talk and preparations boiled down to one simple fact. Lincoln was leaving. Leaving me. For a very long time. I braced myself for a formal "goodbye" kiss, and blurted out loud enough for too many people to hear, "I wish I had something to remember you by." What was I thinking? A ring?

"Jesus Christ," Leibel yelled to us, "where the hell is your brother?"

Lincoln pointed over his shoulder to where Chris and his girlfriend were still smooching. Then he pulled off his sweater and handed it to me. "Here, keep this. I'll bring you back something better from China. In the meantime, this is yours." He pecked me on the cheek and smiled broadly, "See ya." Then he turned to help his father get Chris on the plane.

The sweater, a crewneck of multi-color earth tones, was too big to integrate into my wardrobe and too itchy to wear to bed. But for the first few weeks after the Bergman men took off for China, just before I went to bed, I inhaled my memories of Lincoln through the knit of that sweater.

Earlier that summer, I fretted about how I would pay rent without the monthly teaching assistant check coming in, but I didn't have to worry for long. A notice on the bulletin board of the Sociology Department had caught my eye. A professor at the Institute for International Studies was looking for a summer research assistant to complete a project on the social history of Peru. Despite my anxiety that I had read very little Peruvian history and that the job description called for a more advanced graduate student, I followed the instructions to make an appointment with the professor's associate, Magali Sarfatti.

Armed with my skimpy resume and a copy of the paper I had written at Cornell about trade unions in Peru, I made my way to Magali's office in an old brown-shingled Berkeley house on the edge of campus. Maga-

li's warmth melted my tension. In her throaty Italian/Spanish—accented voice, she thanked me for coming and offered me a cup of espresso. Her striking beauty and grace made me wonder if I had seen her in a Fellini movie. She must have been six feet tall and wore a striped linen suit, tailored like those I had seen wealthy women wear in Peru.

As she prepared the coffee over a hotplate, I silently rehearsed how I would present my qualifications for the job. On the phone, I had already told Magali about the Cornell Peru Project. Perhaps that was enough for her, because she began the interview as if she were the one applying for the job. She told me how her parents fled Italy after World War II. She was raised in Argentina and later studied in Paris. Professor David Apter, the director of the Institute, had recruited her from Paris to work on his project to study "The Politics of Modernization." Eventually the Project would publish a number of monographs—ours on how Spanish colonialism shaped the social structure of Peru would be the first in the series.

"Ours?" I wasn't sure how she meant it. Soon it became evident that she had already decided to hire me. "Well, Arlene," she looped her arm in mine as she showed me around the office, "do you think the project interests you?"

"Oh, yes."

"Wonderful. Can you start right away? We're already behind schedule."

I nodded. She pointed to a pile of books on a desk across from hers. Her speech sped up. "Based on my reading, I've concluded that the Spaniards imposed a system of bureaucratic patrimonialism on Peru. Do you agree?"

I had no idea. What the hell was bureaucratic patrimonialism anyway? I skirted the question. "I have no reason to disagree. Do you want me to read those books?"

"Oh, no, dear. I have another stack for you. I want you to read about the indigenous rebellions against the colonialists. I gather from your work on trade unions that Túpac Amaru would interest you more than the King of Castilla."

I nodded in relief.

In the following weeks, I became somewhat of an expert on the heroism of Túpac Amaru and others who rebelled after thousands of their people were enslaved, tortured or worked to death by the Spaniards. Magali and I also became close friends. After Lincoln left for China, she often invited me to dinner at her apartment which was perched on the side of a hill with a breathtaking view of the sunsets over the Bay. As she washed each leaf of red lettuce separately, she regaled me with stories of her former romances and gossip about the various Marxist academics she knew from universities in Buenos Aires and Paris. That was not only my introduction to varieties of non-iceberg lettuce and quiche, but also to the excitement of learning from a brilliant, cosmopolitan woman's perspective.

Magali had a television, which she never watched, except for the evening news. One weekday night during the last week of July, she turned on the news just in time to catch President Johnson intoning in his Texas drawl,

*"Three presidents have committed to defend this small country [*South Viet Nam*]...We cannot abandon our commitment to prevent the terror and murder by the Asiatic dominion of Communism that would follow if...we are driven from the field in Viet Nam."*

"Who believes that hypocrisy! It's the Americans who terrorize and murder," I yelled at the small screen. I felt a personal fury at Johnson for betraying his promises to bring peace to Viet Nam. He made a mockery of the old SDS slogan, "Part of the way with LBJ." I would never again believe a Democratic Party politician, let alone vote for him.

Magali smiled. "Your countrymen, my dear, will believe it, just like the French did until it was too late. Wait..." She motioned me to be quiet so we could hear more from Johnson.

"I have ordered that our fighting strength in Viet Nam be raised from 75,000 to 125,000 with additional troops to follow...the monthly draft call will increase from 17,000 to 35,000...These are carefully measured steps to bring an end to aggression...We will not surrender and we will not retreat."

I thought of the speeches I had applauded two months earlier, at the 36-hour Viet Nam Day teach-in. Bob Moses, the SNCC leader, had connected the killings of Black people in the South with the killings of peo-

ple in Viet Nam. I didn't remember his exact words, but the message was something like: this is a racist system. Never underestimate the damage it will do to maintain its power. You white people, if you don't begin to see the world the way we do, it will be your loss. And the national SDS leader, Paul Potter, named Johnson's intentions and the system, "The president intends to extend American hegemony to every place in the world...if you are serious about ending the War, you can't go back to business as usual."

I grabbed a piece of scratch paper and multiplied. Johnson would be drafting 35,000 a month—that's 420,000 in a year. "Magali, if we don't stop him, soon he's gonna send a half million troops to Viet Nam."

Magali turned the TV off in disgust. "Remember what that historian argued for at the teach-in?"

"Which one?"

"Staughton Lynd. He called for massive civil disobedience. It was on the agenda during the last Vietnam Day Committee (VDC) meeting."

"I missed that meeting, but I'll definitely make the next one." I was tired of meetings; frustrated with discussions that went on past midnight without resolution—certainly meetings weren't changing "business as usual." Yet I always added my name to the phone list of people to be notified about future meetings or actions. A week later, some VDC people heard that a train carrying troops to the Oakland Army Terminal would pass through Berkeley the next day. I got the phone call. "This is our chance to let Johnson know we will not allow business as usual. We're not going to allow the troop trains through. Will you be there?"

Without hesitating I told the caller he could count on me. I also eagerly took the names of 25 more people to call and tell them each to call ten more. Our phone tree brought more than 150 people to the tracks that ran through the Berkeley flatlands the next day. I wasn't the only one who hadn't had enough time to paint a sign. There was only one "stop the war" sign in the scraggly line we formed along each side of the southbound track and a large banner held by two demonstrators, one on either side of the track. "Stop the War Machine." The cops must not have had enough time to mobilize either or perhaps they didn't take our threat seriously. Nevertheless, the presence of a handful of reporters convinced

me of the importance of the stand we were taking. I felt no fear when the ground began to shake with the approach of the train, only surprise that the huge locomotive seemed to maintain its speed as it blew past and tore right through the banner. It was over before we could organize a chant that the troops on board might hear. We suffered no injuries or arrests, yet in the meeting we had that night to plan the next day, we congratulated ourselves for our willingness "to lay our bodies on the gears of the war machine."

That evening, before the meeting, a CBS reporter stationed in Viet Nam, Morley Safer, narrated as the camera zoomed in on burly, booted American soldiers. They were aiming their automatic rifles at an extended family of barefoot Vietnamese women, their children, and old men dressed in rags, while US troops systematically set fire to every hut in the village. Morley Safer barely masked his anger in his objective announcer's voice, "This is what the War in Viet Nam is about—burning old couples' houses." Then referring to Johnson's recent speech, "It will take more than a presidential promise to convince [the man whose life's work and rice stores had just gone up in flames] that we are on his side."

I had heard about these zippo brigades earlier at a rally. Yet, seeing them in action made our plans for another troop train picket all the more urgent. On August 6, more than 300 of us were there to face down the next troop train. But this time the police were prepared. A wedge of them formed an escort for the train to move through our gauntlet.

A week later on August 12, more than 500 of us lined the Santa Fe railroad tracks that ran through Berkeley's flatlands. I stood several feet back from the track, marveling at the fearlessness of those who stood on it, ready to face down the huge engine charging toward us. I wanted to confront the military machine, but could not muster the courage to die for it. Then, as the ground rumbled, I lost my bearings and any sense of safety in a thick cloud of blinding hot steam that the engine was belching out. At the same time the cops prodded and pushed people off the tracks. Someone fell against me and we both landed on the ground. For an instant, dazed from the steam cloud and the fall and dizzy from fear, I imagined that somehow the train had jumped the tracks to hit us.

Once the engine passed and the steam cleared, I could see some of

the men in our group clinging to the sides of the trains, yelling to the soldiers inside, "Don't go." A few managed to push leaflets through the windows. "Why die in Viet Nam?" I just stood there, proud to be taking a stand—but disappointed with myself that I didn't muster the courage to actually put my body on the line. I had arrived in Berkeley too late to follow Mario Savio's exhortation to put our bodies on the levers of power of the "multi-university." That day in August I had my chance to join the people who were committing their lives to this struggle. We demonstrated that the anti-war movement would no longer politely picket and follow the rules—that if Johnson would escalate the war, we would escalate our confrontations to disrupt the war machine. But in my heart, I knew I had only partly proven my own militancy.

That evening, once more, far up in the hills above those tracks, as Magali whipped the eggs for quiche, I turned on the television, hoping to see the news of how we almost stopped the troop trains. To my surprise, the news showed no white students hanging on to the sides of troop trains at all. Instead, the carcasses of burnt-out cars in the middle of a street lined only by a few charred vertical beams—the remains of burnt out buildings—still smoldering, filled the screen. The camera moved down the deserted street to reveal that only one storefront had been spared. Someone had scrawled, "Blood brother," in black paint on its door. Those words in English were the only visual clue that the war zone was in a US city, not some place overseas that a foreign army had invaded. In a tone of disbelief mixed with contempt, a white TV reporter frowned as he pointed to the destruction, "More than 1000 Negroes rioted in the Watts District last night. They attacked the police with rocks, bricks and bottles."

"Magali, come look at this!" I pointed to a line of helmeted cops marching down the war-torn street—through the smoke and debris—with their guns drawn. "They look like the troops in Viet Nam—just wearing different uniforms."

Foreign wars must have been on the mind of the TV reporter too. He apparently found a young Black man willing to talk into a microphone and asked him, "There are rumors that Mao Zedong or the Viet Cong are behind these riots. What do you think?"

The young man shook his head and smiled. "I don't know who those folks are," and turned to go.

The reporter attempted to grab the man's arm. He stepped back and glared at the reporter, who tried another tactic, "Please, can you tell our TV audience then, why you people are rioting?"

"Ya really wanna know?"

The reporter nodded slowly.

"I guess we don't feel like taking no more mess off the police. There's other things too, but I gotta go now." And moved off camera.

Magali threw her dish towel at the screen. "Americans! Their reporters are too ignorant. Worse than the French during the Algerian revolution. They just can't believe their 'subjects' don't love them. Your president just signed the Voting Rights Act. Too little, too late."

Of course, I knew she was right. I had talked about the same idea with my students and assigned them to write an essay that explained what Malcolm X had meant when he compared the ghettos of the US to colonies. I almost knew the quote by heart. "The same rebellion, the same impatience, the same anger that exists in the hearts of the dark people in Africa and Asia is existing in the hearts and minds of 20 million black people in this country who have been just as thoroughly colonized as the people in Africa and Asia."

I jumped up and jabbed at the air as if I were giving a speech. "Malcolm X predicted this. I guess that's why they had to kill him."

Magali nodded. "C'mon, dear, let's eat before the quiche gets cold."

I couldn't imagine eating at a time like this. I felt like we were witnessing the beginning of the revolution that Malcolm X had died for. "How far is Los Angeles from here? Do you know?" I asked Magali.

She shrugged. "Around 400 miles, I think. But there's no sense going there. This riot may signal the end of an era when Negroes will patiently ask for their civil rights. But there will be many more insurrections before the revolution takes hold. And what do you think you could do down there anyway? Look."

She pointed to the TV screen. The camera homed in on a crowd that had surrounded a car. Two Black men were pulling at a white arm that belonged to the man behind the driver's seat. Finally they succeeded in dislodging the driver from the car and began to punch him. For seconds, the crowd cheered. Then an older Black woman emerged from the crowd and seemed to be scolding the men. She approached the terrified driver and escorted him off camera while an authoritative white voice announced, "No wonder Police Chief Parker has said these people are 'like monkeys in a zoo.'"

"What a bunch of bullshit. We need to find out what's really going on." Fury and frustration pounded behind my eyes. "Sorry Magali, I gotta go. I don't feel too good." I stormed out of her house. I had no words to explain the excitement and pain I was feeling.

When I got home, still shaking, I sat at the kitchen table, trying to figure out what to do. I told myself I should start packing. My roommate Carole had informed me that I had to be out of the apartment before September 1. Thinking about my eviction added to my rage. The landlord had served Carole the notice immediately after Lincoln's sister, Miranda, and her Black boyfriend, Jimmy, had spent the afternoon visiting. "I absolutely will not tolerate Negroes in my house," Carole reported the landlord saying.

"But isn't that illegal?" I objected.

"Not since California passed Proposition 14 overturning the Fair Housing law. You should have known better than to bring a Negro here."

In the six or seven months Carole and I were roommates, we spoke less and less frequently. Even so, she still shocked me when she defended the landlord. "Well, fuck you," I yelled. "I don't want to live with a racist or pay rent to one. Don't worry, I'll be gone by September or even sooner if possible." In fact, I had no trouble finding a new roommate in a house near Shattuck Avenue on Channing Way. The location wasn't as convenient as Carole's apartment, but I would have more space. Before I paid Vivian a deposit, I made sure that she would welcome any Black friends I might bring home.

As I piled books into a carton, I thought about the people of Watts. If I could lose my home to a racist landlord, how much harder would it be for people in Watts to find a decent place to live? I wanted to weep. I wanted to talk to Lincoln. I owed him a letter and had planned to write to him about the demonstration to stop the troop trains. Now that seemed insignificant compared to the flames in Watts. Besides, I did have to pack and as I closed the flaps of each carton, I felt a bit calmer. By the time I had all my stuff in boxes, ready to move to my new home, I was exhausted, ready to sleep, glad that I had taken a small step against my racist roommate and landlord.

In the whirlwind of moving and meetings about Watts and Troop Trains, Lincoln's letter arrived from China before he could have received my news. Dated August 15, his letter seemed deliberately vague, "Heard about LA, also about hundreds of people in Berkeley, in defiance of an order by authorities, who occupied a stretch of track carrying US troops to South Viet Nam."

Then he added an important item that we had not yet heard about. "After three demonstrations on the tracks, the US military gave up routing its trains through Berkeley, California." In my answer, I was too afraid of the CIA censor to mention my pride at being part of the demonstration that had made news around the world, as far away as Peking. I did, however, mention Watts and quoted from an item I had read in the *Peking Review.* An editorial said that the 20 million Negroes in the US have become an important revolutionary force and that they "know full well that they are not alone in their struggle. The anti-US forces throughout the world are on their side and fight shoulder to shoulder with them." I asked Lincoln how the people who wrote *Peking Review* editorials could be so sure what American Negroes thought. Later I found out that Vicki Garvin, a Black radical and comrade of Malcolm X who lived in exile in Ghana and Peking, had a major role in writing that editorial. When she returned to the States some three years later, she would return as the wife of Leibel Bergman.

Guerrilla Vows (1966-1967)

Early in the summer of 1966, Lincoln headed west at the end of his outlaw year in China and I headed east after a year in the vortex of Berkeley's rebellion. Leading up to the reunion with Lincoln, my anger over Johnson's escalation of the war in Viet Nam grew along with frustration over our movement's impotent challenge to the war machine.

I joined other militant demonstrators who were furious at the moderate Viet Nam Day Committee (VDC) leaders. Without a fight, they had ordered our march of 20,000 people to go home when a phalanx of Oakland police blocked our way to the Oakland Army Terminal. That night, October 15, 1965, the kick off for the International Days of Protest, it felt like our "leaders" had betrayed us. The next day, our second attempt to march the seven miles from campus to the Army Terminal also ended at the Oakland border. There, Oakland police blocked us while members of the Hell's Angels Motorcycle gang used two-by-fours and bats to beat those they could reach in the front line. I thought Alan Ginsberg, who gave passionate speeches about how we could pacify the drug-dealing gang with Buddhist chants, was crazy. Although I continued to march against the war, the more I marched, the more convinced I became that we had to actively join the war, to fight, if possible, on the side of the Vietnamese people.

On Friday, April 8, 1966, after one of the endless meetings at the VDC Office to plan another demonstration, Joel and some of the other Steering Committee members decided to take a break. I was thrilled that they invited me to join them for a rare excursion into San Francisco to

listen to Horace Silver and his Quintet. Yet, I hesitated to accept the invitation. After all, I had committed to painting signs for the April 12 event. Even so, since it was steering committee members who were inviting me to leave, I gave into the lure of the chance to explore a bit of the City with some of the organization's leaders.

The second set had already started by the time we settled into our seats. I don't remember much about the music, only the drummer who nodded to me as I sipped from a glass of white wine. I was flattered by his attention, and wondered how to return his attention without seeming too eager. Joel had slipped away for a minute to find a payphone to let his housemate know he had forgotten his keys. When he returned, he was shaking. He loudly cleared his throat and made no apologies for interrupting either the music or my budding flirtation. "They bombed the Fulton Street house! Some of our people were still inside making puppets for the Tuesday demo. A few got taken to the hospital. This is attempted murder. We gotta get back there."

We sped back across the bridge but by the time we got to 2407 Fulton Street—a dilapidated rooming house where VDC rented the first floor—the police had cleared and taped off the scene. The blast had been heard a mile away and windows were blown out in all the surrounding houses. Fortunately, no one was critically injured, but four VDC members received cuts from flying glass and burns. Their injuries were serious enough to sound a loud alarm among those of us who met and worked nearly round-the-clock at the headquarters: we were not only against the war, *we were at war*.

Barely two months later, through a series of cryptic letters Lincoln and I arranged to meet at the Information Booth of Victoria Station in the heart of London. I hadn't slept on the transatlantic flight, or the night before I departed. The thought of actually holding Lincoln, after all those nights of fantasy, powered me on. His letters had assured me that he still loved me—and, unlike me, had even remained celibate during our year of separation. Yet I replayed anxious scenarios in my head. Had there been a snag in his travel plans? Worse, had the CIA nabbed him? Had he been busted for draft evasion?

I spotted a lean man, about 5'10", pacing in front of the Information Booth the way Lincoln paced the halls of Telluride before he wrote a poem. Still, I wasn't sure it was him. He looked like a business man disguised as Lincoln. He wore a blue-gray suit and matching tie. I had never seen Lincoln in a suit. If this man ever had Lincoln's thick wavy black hair, a barber had long ago cropped it off. And where was his mustache? I slowed my pace.

"Arl, damn Arlene, you look good," I heard this Lincoln look-alike call as he approached.

While his businessman's get-up may have convinced a CIA agent that this man could not have possibly been a dangerous revolutionary, his deep radio-announcer's voice was unmistakable to me. I reached for him. Our long hug, so familiar despite that stiff suit, made me feel safe and loved. He was so eager to celebrate our reunion, right there, surrounded with people hurrying to catch their trains, he pulled a heavy solid silver bracelet out of his suit pocket.

"I got this for you. I thought about getting an engagement ring—but then I found this. It's better than any ring. It's a very special antique—there are only a few of them in the whole world. It's hundreds of years old. Look at the carving."

On the inner side of the bracelet, the carved geometric design resembled a traditional indigenous Aztec maze. On the outside, carvings of stylized lions looked more typically Chinese. "It's beautiful," I muttered. "And mysterious. Like a knob to the door of a tomb that holds ancient secrets. I love it."

"To me it symbolizes the unity of Asia and America, our unity. Put it on."

I had to scrunch my fingers so they could squeeze through the opening and push hard before the bracelet comfortably encircled my wrist. I swore I would never take it off.

In London we cemented our union, not with marriage vows, but by reading our journals to each other. We committed to those daily readings, telling ourselves that they would bring us as close as we might have been if we had actually lived together during our year of separation. I was 24,

Lincoln 22. Along the route from London to Paris, to Barcelona, Marseilles, Salerno, Athens and back to London, on the cliffs of the Costa Brava and in the bathroom on the ferry from Brindisi to Greece, we fed our insatiable passion in each seedy hotel listed in *Europe on Five Dollars A Day*. Despite the lovemaking, I grew bored listening to Lincoln read about his daily routine in Peking.

"November 13. My lectures are going well. Played ping pong with some students...." I hid a yawn. I perked up when he occasionally mentioned his thoughts about me. By the time we returned to London 6 weeks later, Lincoln was still reading his journal aloud to me. Yet, our debates about the future pumped more than enough drama into our small hotel room. We worried that since Lincoln had failed to report for his Army induction, he faced the risk of arrest as soon as he re-entered US territory. I proposed a solution that seemed obvious to me.

"Let's not go back to the States at all." The prospect of exile excited me.

Lincoln recoiled. "No way. What would we do here! We need to go back."

I matched his determination. "There's nothing to go back to except the American War Machine. Graduate school is a waste of time. And our politics are going nowhere." I tried to convince him with examples. Stokely Carmichael[7] keeps trying to explain to anyone who didn't get the message from Watts, that the Black movement wants revolution, not reform. SNCC wants white people to organize other white people against racism, but no one seems to know how. Ever since the VDC Office was bombed, the anti-war movement in Berkeley has split. More than half the core of VDC were happy to join the safety of Bob Scheer's electoral campaign for Congress. Those of us who realized that we are at war inside the US and against the Democratic Party—refused to do electoral work at all. Besides, our contacts in Europe could help us find jobs here and we could work for the London International Days of Protest Committee..

Lincoln didn't yell. He never yelled, but a hint of impatience in his tone alerted me: I had better take this seriously. "Arlene. You can't mean that. People all over the world talk about Berkeley's anti-war movement."

7 **Ed Note:** Later adopting the name Kwame Ture.

"So?" I felt less confident, but pressed on. "Sure. All last year, we marched. At least once a month—sometimes once a week and each march would be bigger than the last. But it didn't matter. We would add another 10,000 people to the streets and Johnson would ship another 10,000 troops to Viet Nam. We got clubbed and bombed and still don't have enough power to fight back. It's a lost cause."

"Arlene," he paused. I think he didn't want to hurt me by letting me know how deeply wrong he thought I was. He spoke slowly, taking time to choose and emphasize the importance of each word.

"I see how you might think that. But if you had been reading the Chinese press regularly or news bulletins from Cuba or Algeria, you wouldn't see it that way. The people of the world are all on the side of the Vietnamese. Millions of Chinese have volunteered to fight there. The Vietnamese will win. That's for sure."

I had never heard Lincoln speak so emphatically. Amazing, I thought. "He's really clear. Maybe my thinking is fogged over by a daily dose of American propaganda." But I wasn't ready to give up so easily. "OK—so if there are all those Chinese ready to fight, what does it matter what we do?"

For the first time in this conversation, Lincoln smiled. "First, the Vietnamese have not accepted the Chinese volunteers. They say they can defeat the US Army on their own. GI's have no motivation to fight, especially the Black ones. You know what they say?"

I shook my head. He answered his own question.

"'No Vietnamese ever called me nigger.' The Vietnamese are defending their homes, their families, their way of life. The US Army is just following orders. Their defeat is inevitable. It's only a question of how long it will take, how much destruction, death and sacrifice it will take. The demonstrations in Berkeley and every place else will make Vietnamese liberation come quicker."

Finally, this new understanding of the balance of power in the world challenged and inspired me. It mattered what we did. The sooner the Vietnamese won, the sooner US imperialism would be weakened, the sooner we could overhaul the system at home. We were actually part of a

OAKLAND, California, February 1966. First women's march against the Viet Nam War. Marching on the Oakland Induction Center, Arlene is carrying the sign in center of first row.

worldwide struggle. We should get back to the States as soon as possible to rejoin the movement. I felt exhilarated.. Then suddenly sobered. "But what about your draft status? They'll throw you in jail - if not for traveling to China, then for failing to report for induction."

"Look at the sacrifices the Vietnamese people are making. If they can survive US carpet bombing and torture, then surely I can risk a little jail time." Then Lincoln winked. "But I doubt it will come to that, especially if we can get help from one of those leftist lawyers; maybe one would even meet us at the airport when we land."

We ended up spending five anxious weeks in London as cables between the law office of Kunstler and Kinoy and the American Express Office in London crisscrossed the Atlantic. During that time, we could no longer afford to stay in a hotel. So we searched classified ads for a place in a rooming house we could afford. Each time we climbed the steps of one of those brick buildings that resembled four-story walkups on the

lower east side of New York, or a Harlem brownstone, a landlady told us through a barely opened door, "Sorry, it's rented."

We persevered. On the fourth try, the landlady gave me one disapproving glance, and before she slammed the door, she spat in disgust. "No Coloured allowed here!"

I was flabbergasted, confused and furious. Only Lincoln's arm around my shoulder prevented me from banging on the door. We walked away slowly. "Let's get something to eat. Figure out our next moves." He pointed to the Lyon's down the block.

"We can't afford any more restaurants," I whined with a mix of anger, fear and frustration.

"Just some tea." He led me into the working-class cafeteria.

When we finally sat down, Lincoln playfully tugged at the single long brown braid that hung down below my breast. "She must have thought you were Indian or Pakistani," he mused.

I glanced at my arm, still bronzed from our week on Mykonos and other Mediterranean beaches. I ranted in a whisper, "I wanted to tell that landlady, you ignorant bitch, can't you tell the difference between a suntanned New York Jew with green eyes and a Pakistani! But I'll be damned if I would try to 'pass' for white so I could pay some racist woman a cent!"

An Arab man sitting at the table next to us overheard our conversation. "Excuse me," he directed his educated, English-accented voice toward us. "I hope you don't mind. I don't mean to interfere, but perhaps I can help you. My name is Habib." Lincoln shook the hand Habib extended across the narrow space between our tables.

"I'm Lincoln. This is Arlene. Are you from around here?"

"Yes, my parents emigrated from Egypt. You're from the States, right?"

With introductions completed, Habib offered, "You'll never find a place to stay in this section of London. But I know there's a vacancy in the rooming house where I stay—it's owned by a Jamaican who inherited a lot of money from his white father. We have only colored people staying there. Are you interested?"

"Sure," Lincoln and I answered in unison. "What's the rent?"

"I don't know for sure about that room, but it will be less than anything advertised in the *Times.* Nevertheless, I have to warn you, the vacancy is in the basement."

"That's ok," we nodded in unison.

The room was small, crammed with a single bed, table, tiny stove-top and sink. We shared the toilet down the hall with people who lived in the two other basement rooms. Only cold water came out of the sink's faucet and the clean sheets on the bed could not block the odor of mildew emanating from the mattress. Ignoring the chill, I cheerfully christened the room as "our first apartment." And, I set out to decorate it with postcards we had collected of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) Peace Symbol, Rodin sculptures and Mediterranean sunsets.

While we waited to hear from the lawyers, we explored London, learned from the anti-colonial radicals Habib introduced us to and debated with the editors of *New Left Review* about the Chinese revolution. Finally, the departure date was set: September 19. I could not rearrange my charter flight, so I would have to arrive three hours after Lincoln.

"I'll be there to welcome you back to the good ole USA," he tried to reassure me.

If he didn't appear as scheduled, we planned for me to phone the law office and Kinoy would immediately intervene. During that flight, my imagination gave free rein to our worst fears: images of Lincoln with his ankles shackled and his wrists handcuffed to the arms of a chair with a bright light blinding him, surrounded by men in army uniforms and FBI agents in suits spitting questions at him. "Admit it. Your father is a comrade of Mao Zedong. Did he force you to go to China? Why didn't you show up for your Army induction?"

On the plane, I couldn't eat or sleep—even though I had a whole row of seats to myself. By the time I cleared customs, I was dizzy and certain I would never see my lover again. I scanned the crowd of anxious families, waiting on the other side of the rope for their loved ones arriving from London. Then, from the far-left side of the front of the crowd I spotted Lincoln. He waved wildly. There he was in the brown corduroy

sport jacket the Chinese tailors had made for him, smiling broadly for reasons the people around us could never imagine.

We found an affordable three-room apartment in West Berkeley, on Delaware Street right off San Pablo, in a building that could pass for a cheap motel. Those beautiful, brown-shingled art cottages that populated Berkeley were out of reach. While we were still eating cold cereal and sandwiches on paper plates, we filled the living room with makeshift desks and our books. Lincoln enrolled as a Graduate student in Journalism and I returned to my Sociology seminars.

On our first free weekday afternoon, we drove into San Francisco to hunt through the second-hand stores for chairs, pots, and other essentials. More importantly, we had planned to visit Chris and Miranda who shared an apartment at the edge of the Fillmore District. Lincoln had been looking forward to this reunion after a year of separation from his brother and sister. (Chris insisted on leaving China after a couple of months.) We weren't prepared for Chris's greeting,

"Have you heard about the riot in Hunters Point? C'mon guys, we were just about to check out what's happening on Fillmore Street. We heard it's spreading there."

I felt embarrassed that we had been so immersed in getting settled that we had no idea that the new militant Black Power revolution had caught fire a few miles from home. Obediently, we followed Chris and Miranda out to the streets, while they filled us in on the details.

I remembered Third Street as wide, with three lanes in each direction—lined with auto body repair shops, bars, liquor stores, dry cleaners, grocery stores that sold single cigarettes and pints of Hennessey, churches, a community center and Opera House that looked like an old hotel from a Western movie. I drove there with friends, only a few times, looking for barbecue. Our carload of anti-war demonstrators had been the only white people in sight.

Now, Miranda explained that near Third Street, two days earlier on a hot Tuesday afternoon, Matthew Johnson, only sixteen, died immediately when a cop shot him in the back. Word of the murder travelled

quickly through groups of young Black men on the streets. Their simmering fury at daily police harassment and brutality boiled over. They threw rocks. One hit a cop car whose driver radioed that "he had been hit." In minutes, hundreds of cops invaded Third Street and the riot was on. The next night police fired hundreds of live rounds into a community center where 200 children were taking refuge. Miraculously, no kids were hurt, but eight adults were wounded. Some 1,200 National Guard and Highway Patrol arrived to prevent "another Watts." But there had only been sporadic looting, rock throwing and small-scale arson. The invasion of troops marching down Third Street with bayonets drawn turned an angry protest against police brutality into an all-out rebellion against decrepit housing projects, job discrimination, sub-standard segregated schools and constant humiliation by white police, politicians, landlords and business-owners.

From the intersection of Haight and Fillmore, we walked up Fillmore towards the heart of the second-largest Black neighborhood in the City. Except for a few hand-drawn posters in store windows: "Black owned", "We're with the Brothers of the Point", the only signs of the rebellion were brigades of Highway Patrol and San Francisco cops stationed at each corner, waving away any cars that attempted to turn onto Fillmore Street. It looked like a one-sided battle zone, where only the troops in uniforms had shown up, a conquered occupied territory.

"Where do you think you kids are going?" a cop barked in our direction.

"Just up the street a bit to get something to eat." Chris's shoulder-length red hair framed his smile. I noticed all the shops on the street were closed. A few had broken windows.

"Not today. Go home. Or would you like me to arrest you for breaking curfew?"

Miranda tugged at her brother's sleeve, "Let's go."

My own tension mounted as Chris pulled his arm away from Miranda's reach. Chris had just turned 17, and his trip to China had done nothing to dampen his anti-authoritarian spirit. "But, officer, don't we have some time before curfew? It's still light."

"Curfew is when I say it is, dammit. Now get your little hippy ass out of here before I lose my temper."

"Yes, sir." Chris made an exaggerated salute with his free arm as Lincoln turned him around and pushed him back down the street.

"What the fuck was that about?" Lincoln scolded. "Ya wanna to get us all busted!"

"Lighten up, Linc. I never get busted for curfew. And he has no right to talk about curfew before it's even dark."

"Maybe so, but it looks like we're under martial law now, with no rights at all. Ya gotta learn the basic strategy of guerrilla war." He continued his lecture, "Like Mao says, only engage the enemy when he isn't expecting it, when he's weak, when you think you can win."

"Yes, comrade." Chris saluted playfully. "Meanwhile, let's go over to the Haight, I heard that our folks were planning a demonstration there tonight. No way they'll accept an 8PM curfew, let alone a 6:30 one."

I shivered. It was still light out, but the fog had rolled in. We stopped for fish and chips and by the time we got to Haight and Ashbury, it was dusk. Pockets of people, some white with long hippy hair, some straighter looking students, and a handful of Black people milled around, waiting for something to happen. A few held signs in solidarity with Black people in Hunters Point, demanding an end to curfew and the withdrawal of the National Guard. I was disappointed. This was not my idea of "urban rebellion." The crowd in the street paled in comparison to scenes from Watts or our huge Berkeley marches.

"Hey, let's get our car, and drive over to Hunters Point," I proposed.

"That's not our turf, this is," Chris sounded much more serious, mature than he had a few minutes earlier. "The brothers don't need no white folks fighting their battles for them in the Point. They need white kids to draw cops away from them. I say we stay here."

Lincoln and Miranda nodded. "Of course they're right," I thought, but I still felt uneasy about our small numbers. I had noticed a police bus turn off Haight and head around the corner at Clayton. Except for our scraggly demonstration, hardly anyone was on the street. Squad cars blocked access to Haight Street at each corner: Masonic, Ashbury, Clay-

ton. We were trapped. It was a few minutes before 8PM. Suddenly, cops at Clayton Street started grabbing people and pushing them onto the bus. I saw four or five cops invade a grocery store, grab a Black couple and arrest them too. Those of us near the intersection of Haight and Ashbury started running down Ashbury opposite from where an empty squad car was parked. A few demonstrators followed us. One carried a sign that read, "Now Matthew Johnson won't have to fight in Viet Nam." As we ran towards the safety of the Panhandle, I wondered if the Black teenager shot by police near his home would have survived in the Vietnamese jungles 10,000 miles away. By the time we regrouped by the playground, I was still panting and the tears that had been gathering finally streamed down my sweaty face.

The next day, the newspaper reported that 70 hippies had been arrested at Haight and Cole, but we had only seen people arrested at Clayton. The police claimed that they had warned us to disperse before they began the arrests. That was a lie. The *Chronicle* also published a map that showed where the 8PM curfew would be enforced. The "no-go" area included Bayview, Hunters Point and the "Greater Fillmore," which they gerrymandered to include only areas where Black people and white hippies congregated.

By the time the uprising in Hunters Point petered out on Saturday, more than 450 people had been arrested and 160 injured—including 58 cops. Politicians made promises to work to "eliminate the barriers to fair housing and employment." Business on Third Street limped back to usual, albeit with broken windows boarded over.

Lincoln and I returned to Berkeley. I threw myself into the planning for "Black Power Day" on campus, even more certain that the time for begging for reforms was over. We needed a new teach-in, like the Viet Nam Day, that would launch a massive movement in solidarity with the Black Power revolution.

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We crammed our days with classes, rallies, meetings, demonstrations and work. Before the end of 1966, excitement over the new Black Power Movement dominated our campus discussions. One night that fall, Davey Wellman brought me to the office of *The Movement*, which they

had been publishing as a *Friends of SNCC Newsletter*. I had devoured the issue that circulated around the time of the Black Power Conference that included a "Black Power Supplement." Long articles by Stokely Carmichael and Malcolm X sent my mind flying in the direction of revolutionary possibility. But a small box that quoted from a SNCC field secretary who had spoken at an SDS Convention forced my attention to a more sober task. As I read it, I felt Charlie Cobb was talking directly to me.

"White people must challenge the basis of this society's existence—Black slavery and Indian genocide...these things have to be exposed and overturned in the white community." Cobb and the other SNCC leaders were saying they didn't want us to be cheerleaders as they faced billy clubs, arrests and even assassinations. They expected us to risk our lives too—to speak to the hecklers, to take on Klan supporters, to show poor whites that their own freedom would only come from allying with the Black Power Movement.

I thought about how my parents, and it seemed everyone I met, had favored my brothers. I thought about the regular monthly screaming arguments and tears in my parents' house when they had no money to pay the bills. I thought about shock treatments and squirming in a straight jacket at South Oaks. None of it was fair and all of it had to do with the unjust way society defined "normal." I understood that the cops who beat us were defending the president who betrayed his campaign promises. Even though I would never directly face the institutions created by genocide and slavery, I was beginning to understand I had a stake in getting rid of the system they spawned and a responsibility to resist the legacy I had inherited as a white person in the USA.

The Movement editors committed themselves to publish a newspaper by and for organizers, ready to take up the Black Power challenge. I was eager to sign up. In that cluttered office on the second floor of a church on 14th Street in San Francisco's Mission District, Davey and some other people laughed often as they gathered strips of typeset articles. Amidst the banter, they bent over light tables, carefully trimmed the strips of copy, lined them up over blue guidelines and glued them onto poster boards. I stood awkwardly in the corner, trying to figure out what I could do to help.

For several months Lincoln and I wrapped up bundles of newspapers and arranged them in zip code order to ship out to movement offices in Los Angeles, Seattle, Madison, Austin, DC, Albuquerque, Chicago, Detroit, Atlanta and New York. We proofread galleys, and learned to wield X-Acto blades and T-squares during the all-night layout sessions before the paper went to press. Although I had yet to write an article, the work lifted my spirits. I was contributing to a revolutionary newspaper that helped to sustain and direct the movement beyond the latest demonstration—even the biggest ones.

In San Francisco, on April 15, 1967, the Spring Mobilization March, 100,000 strong against the war, seemed to stretch all the way from the base of Market Street to the Haight. Chanting, "One two three four, we don't want your fuckin war," we thundered into Kezar Stadium. I clapped with everyone else when they announced that 400,000 more people had marched in New York City. Yet, as I sat listening to speech after speech, my boredom morphed into certainty that legal, peaceful demonstrations, no matter how large, were not going to stop the war. I was sure that even if we had millions of people demonstrating politely on weekends, Johnson would continue shipping soldiers to Viet Nam. Our Editorial group at *The Movement* was right not to feature the Spring Mobe. Instead, we ran articles on the draft resistance movement spreading among Black youth and reports from SNCC leaders about their recent visit to Viet Nam. Our editorial insisted that if enough people interfered with business as usual—through civil disobedience and urban insurrections, and resisted the draft-we could help end the war.

Then, barely a week later, a new organization called the Black Panther Party, grabbed the spotlight in all our political debates. Lincoln and I stood in Sproul Plaza, checking in about our after-class plans: where would we meet, who needed the car, who would pick up groceries for dinner. A friend from *The Movement* trotted over to us waving a copy of *The New York Times.* He yelled, "Check this out." The headline screamed, "**ARMED NEGROES PROTEST GUN BILL; 30 Black Panthers Invade Sacramento Legislature, Lawmakers Startled."** I grabbed the paper and read aloud, *"SACRAMENTO, Calif., May 2 (UPI) - With loaded rifles and shotguns in their hands, members of the antiwhite Black Panther party marched into the state Capitol today. A leader announced*

they were protesting new gun legislation scheduled for consideration by an Assembly committee."

I stared at the photo of a line of Black men wearing berets, pointing shotguns at the sky, standing at the door of the Capitol. Were these the same beret-wearing guys who I had seen on Telegraph Avenue selling Mao Zedong's *Little Red Book* and passing out mimeographed leaflets listing their "Ten Point Program"? I had heard talk about a new group called the Black Panther Party for Self Defense that had organized a demonstration in Richmond against police brutality and were patrolling Oakland with guns to defend Black people against police brutality and murder. Their Ten Points demanded freedom, self-determination and an end to capitalist robbery of the Black community. A revolution.

I knew from Watts and the small uprising in Hunters Point the previous summer that it wasn't only in the South where police routinely brutalized Black people. On campus, we organized against the Viet Nam War, we organized a teach-in about Black Power, we published tons of articles in *The Movement* about SNCC and struggles in the South, but had been mute about the Black Panthers. Rumors about Black Panthers right here, within walking distance from Campus, sent my mind soaring in the direction of revolutionary possibility.

Now *The New York Times* and *The Oakland Tribune* blazed headlines that implied this armed "anti-white" organization was about to start a race war by shooting up the state capitol. I was frightened, but not for myself. I knew from the lies the mainstream press spewed about the "riots" and Black Power that this new Black Panther Party could not possibly be guilty as the media charged. They couldn't be peddling Mao, the leader of workers of all races around the world, and be "anti-white." I was frightened for the Panthers. Part of me concluded that they were posturing in Sacramento. The police would send them all to jail and that would be the end of the Black Panther Party for Self Defense before they had a chance to get off the ground. Then, another feeling eclipsed the fear. The Panthers, with their berets and guns, *Little Red Books* and street patrols in Oakland brought "Black Power" out of the lecture hall, out of the South. Black power had arrived in my new hometown. The revolution had arrived in the flesh, in the Bay Area. I had to find a way to join, not just be a cheerleader for it.

Before *The Movement* editorial group could even begin to discuss how to support the Panthers in Sacramento, our office—which we shared with Bay Area SNCC—was raided. We arrived, May 22, to find the floor of the office carpeted with the stencil cards that we used to make address labels. The invaders stole subscription lists, addresses and phone numbers of all US and international contacts and other confidential files. Nothing of material value was missing. We had no proof, but we were sure the FBI was responsible for the break-in. J. Edgar Hoover had accused SNCC of being part of a conspiracy to overthrow the US government and a number of SNCC offices around the country had been raided. We knew Hoover designed these conspiracy claims to gain political and financial support for increased repression. Yet, the assault on our office confirmed to me that work on *The Movement* was, in fact, a threat to the white power structure and therefore, my work there was more than cheerleading.

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Lincoln and I commuted to San Francisco to work on the newspaper together, we studied together, we marched in the streets together, inhaled tear gas together—and he usually washed his share of dishes. We were equally outraged by Israel's preemptive war that June. In six days, the country SNCC had labelled "a foothold for American and British exploitation of the Middle East and Africa," [8] expanded to three and a half times its "mandated" size. I had absorbed his lessons about Viet Nam, China and Marxist Theory.

Despite all this sharing and political unity with Lincoln, I grew restless. Towards the end of a year of living together on Delaware Street, our relationship began to feel stagnant. In an unusually frank phone conversation with my mother, I confessed: "I've known him for almost three years and we've lived together for a year, but I'm not sure I want to marry him. I get bored with him. Sometimes I think we're just not right for each other."

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8 White progressive supporters of SNCC, especially those who provided financial backing abandoned SNCC (and our *Movement* newspaper) when SNCC published militant anti-imperial, anti-zionist internationalist statements after the 1967 June War. I urge those who still debate US responsibility for Israel's genocidal project against the Palestinian people, especially since October 2023, to review those statements issued more than 50 years ago.

"Arlene, this is real life," my mother lectured. "It's only in fairy tales that women are sure they've met the man of their dreams. The longer you wait, the more doubts you'll have. Get married now and later you'll learn to love him more. Besides, you're no spring chicken."

I winced, but agreed. I was almost 25 and nearly all my friends were already married. Still, before I agreed to marry him, I pressed him to make two promises: first, never to use his status as husband to commit me to a mental hospital and second, to always tell me the truth. "For sure," he responded without hesitation, refusing to even consider, let alone, foresee, reality.

Planning for our wedding enlivened our routine. At first, we asked a rabbi to preside. He refused to read the marriage vows that Lincoln had written. We finally found a Unitarian Minister to read Lincoln's lyrical declaration of our "guerrilla love." So on July 7, 1967, a month after Israel swallowed massive chunks of Palestinian, Egyptian and Syrian territory, two months after Muhammad Ali refused induction into the US Army and the Black Panthers had marched into the Sacramento legislature, we were married.

The only love to love is a guerrilla love...It is with the poor people of this earth that the cause of love is grounded, with the slow and twisting, yet sure, boomerang of history that is turning and announcing freedom....That we are joined in this time of crisis, confusion and change...pledging our two lives to the attempt to translate pretty words and hopes into meaningful action...

We took these vows under a redwood tree in the front yard of the rustic home of Lincoln's Uncle Bernie. I felt warm and proud. I was marrying Lincoln Bergman, a poet and comrade and joining his revolutionary family. There's a photo of me beaming, in a mini-skirted white dress, holding a lit Marlboro in one hand and a big knife in the other—about to slice into the peace symbol that covered our wedding cake. Lincoln's brother Chris—the family's ace DJ—provided the music. Lincoln and I danced over and over in the center of the circle to the Rolling Stones's "Under My Thumb"—both of us oblivious to the significance of the lyrics.

If the year had been 1970, when the women's movement thundered into our home, I never would have considered marriage at all. Instead, on

LAGUNITAS, California, July, 1967. Arlene cuts the wedding cake, Lincoln Bergman, the groom, is at her left.

our wedding day, concerned that he would be insulted if I didn't take his name, I became Arlene Eisen-Bergman. I resented the name change, but never resisted the implied subordination of my identity. After all, every woman I knew took her husband's name when she married.

We drove to Mexico City for our honeymoon. Before we returned to Berkeley three weeks later, Black insurrections had swept through Newark, Detroit, Memphis, Washington DC and several other major cities. I strained to translate the Mexican press. It seemed like the Viet Nam War was coming home at last. We met with Quiñones, an old comrade of Lincoln's father. He introduced us to protégés of Diego Rivera, the famous muralist—Rina Lazo and her husband Bustos. They lived in an ancient mansion that Cortez built for his Aztec lover, Malinche. We talked for hours about the struggles of oppressed Black people in the US and Indigenous people in Mexico. The conversation in that chilly old mansion filled with Mayan art from Palenque and sketches by Rivera and Frida Kahlo thrilled me. Finally, I was sure I had chosen the right man to be my lifelong partner.

Barricades (1967-1968)

Even people with poor memories invariably share detailed accounts of where they were when they heard that John F. Kennedy was assassinated, or generations later, when the hijacked planes crashed into the Twin Towers. I vividly recall the scene where I first heard that Che Guevara was dead. October 9, 1967. I hadn't quit grad school yet and was in a meeting with a few other radical sociology graduate students. We had commandeered the blackboard of an unused classroom to outline our plans for an issue of a new radical graduate student publication, *The Berkeley Journal of Sociology*, when Davey burst in. "I just heard on the radio that they found Che in Bolivia. He's dead."

"No way!" I barely heard the chorus of questions. "Where?" "How?" I refused to consider that the man who had most incarnated my faith in the inevitability of a victorious peoples' revolution had died. Only months had passed since Che's directive to "create two, three, many Viet Nams" echoed around the world. In late 1966, Che made the call in an address to representatives of the people of Asia, Africa and Latin America at the Tricontinental Congress convened in Havana. He had urged oppressed people everywhere to reject imperialist pressure to capitulate. Instead, he called on us to "carry the war into every corner the enemy happens to carry it: to his home, to his centers of entertainment...It is necessary to prevent him from having a moment of peace..." Che concluded his call with a blend of inspiration, ideology, and marching orders.

"Our every action is a battle cry against imperialism, a battle hymn for the people's unity against the great enemy of humanity: the USA. Wherever

death may surprise us, let it be welcome, provided that this, our battle cry, may have reached some receptive ear and another hand may be extended to wield our weapons and others be ready to intone the funeral dirge with the staccato singing of machine-guns and new battle cries of war and victory."

Very early one morning, around the time I first read the pamphlet with Che's message to the Tricontinental, I dreamed he arrived in New York City to give a similar speech to the United Nations. Somehow, I was recruited to serve as his guide and translator. Me! The thrill of that dream stayed with me for years. No, the report of Che's death could only be another rumor, wishful thinking promoted by *The New York Times* and CIA. But on October 15, 1967, the newsstands were filled with reports that Cuba had declared three days of national mourning for Che. On October 18, Fidel himself gave Che's eulogy to one million Cubans who had gathered in grief. Fidel insisted that imperialists were simply "lucky" to kill Che. "[his death] did not represent a defeat of his ideas." Rather, Fidel affirmed that Che's example would live on through the "millions of hands outstretched to grasp weapons, inspired by his example."

During our planning for Stop the Draft Week, we frequently invoked Che's call, to follow Vietnamese leadership and to give the imperialists no rest. Federal law required that every man in the US register for the draft when he reached his 18th birthday. Thereafter, the threat of receiving an induction notice to report for duty loomed over all our heads. For months, draft-age men had been burning draft cards and organizations had popped up all over the country to counsel and support people who refused to fight in Viet Nam. After endless meetings in *The Movement* office, I nodded fervently as the most militant men in the room proclaimed that it was time to "plant the seeds of guerrilla war" here inside the US We would lay siege to the Oakland Induction Center, the same week anti-draft demonstrations were happening in Washington DC and other cities. We argued with the pacifists that although we aimed to avoid injury and arrest, our goal was to shut down the Induction Center, and there was no way to do it without confronting the police. We insisted we had the right to defend ourselves when the cops attacked.

The night air was cold and damp at 4:00AM, October 22, as Lincoln and I made our way to the steps of Sproul Hall on the Berkeley campus to meet the others in our "monitor group." Several thousand milled around,

tense with anticipation of battle. As planned, we wore motorcycle helmets and an extra layer of clothes under leather jackets to protect us from clubs and rubber bullets and carried water-soaked rags in plastic bags to protect against tear gas. The itchy helmet straps squeezed my head too tight. In the darkness, under the layers, it was hard to recognize the six other members of our group—even though we were all close friends. As a monitor group we were supposed to stay together and protect each other. I wondered to myself: would any of the men in our group protect me if I couldn't run as fast as them? As we squeezed into one car, I tried to quiet my fear. If Che could sacrifice his life, the least we could do was risk billy clubs and arrests in order to shut down the Induction Center.

It was still dark when we arrived at the Induction Center at 5:00AM. We had enough people to fill the space on two sides of the Center. I relaxed a bit as our people totally blocked the entrance. Our group stayed together as we marched from 15th to 16th Street, then around the corner and back. We would allow no draftees to be forced into the Army that day.

The sky lightened only a bit and at about 6:30AM, without warning, hundreds of cops waded into our lines, swinging their clubs and spraying mace at everyone in their paths. Lincoln grabbed my hand and pulled me along as he ran towards the corner away from the crowd. Somehow, we made it past the police lines without getting hit, but it was impossible to avoid the tear gas spewing from the hundreds of cans the cops were hurling at us. I coughed and gasped. The mace made me dizzy and desperate, like I would sacrifice anything for a breath of fresh air. I tried to rinse my burning eyes with the little bit of water I could squeeze from my wet rag. But the fire in my eyes only burned worse. As I staggered away from the crowd I realized I had lost Lincoln and my helmet. I don't know how long I wandered around the perimeter of the battle before I could read the street signs. I saw one of our men carrying a homemade plywood shield with a poster of Che on the side that faced a column of cops. As he taunted them, I ran in the opposite direction. The lawyer's phone number I had written on the inside of my wrist had blurred. It didn't matter. The police only intended to disperse us, not arrest us that day.

Eventually I found our group building a barricade to block traffic on San Pablo Avenue. They were in high spirits. They had delayed, perhaps

even prevented, some eighteen-year-olds from joining the war machine that day. The barricades on San Pablo announced to the world that we would disrupt business as usual as long as the war continued. I felt a bit demoralized by my fear, drained, and doubtful, but not defeated. I had survived my first street battle to fight another day.

By January 1968, my hatred for the police boiled over, as a cop swinging the longest billy club I had ever seen chased me down the steepest portion of California Street, down from Nob Hill, away from the elite's Fairmont Hotel. There, Secretary of State Dean Rusk was giving a speech to promote sending even more US troops to Viet Nam. I was part of a relatively small weekday peaceful picket of maybe 500 people and had been trying to leave the scene when the police launched their attack. A Tac Squad cop, covered with helmet and padding, was chasing me. I lost my balance as I ran down the steep street and stumbled against a brick wall, which prevented me from hurtling down the street on my back. That was when the cop trapped me against the building with his club. His swing was purely vindictive, not designed to force my dispersal, but rather to scare me enough to keep me away from the next demonstration. Instinctively I raised my arm to protect my head. That tiny act of resistance seemed to give him pause. In that moment, a woman whose peacoat was covered in anti-war buttons ran towards us yelling, "fuckin pig, leave her alone." My Tac Squad assailant turned to see the source of the insult. In that instant, his gear slowed him enough to allow us both to escape his next swing.

As we ran from that crippling club, the image of the police "protecting" the most luxurious hotel in the City, where the architect of the Viet Nam War was speaking, dramatized, deepened and personalized the message of many of our leaflets and articles: "The police, like the US troops in Viet Nam, have nothing to do with protecting democracy. Rather they protected the property of rich white people and the power of the politicians who run the war machine."

As the summer of 1968 approached, Che's message came alive in the heat generated by Black people's uprisings in more than 100 cities after Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated on April 4. At *The Movement*

newspaper, our editorial group stayed in close contact with other activists, "our correspondents," in Washington DC, Chicago, Detroit, Boston and Pittsburgh.

Chicago police killed eleven Black people and injured 500 more in the course of putting down the insurrection that followed King's assassination. With our commitment to encourage white organizers to follow the lead of Black revolutionaries, *The Movement's* coverage featured anti-racist white people who organized to pressure police and national guard to scatter their forces away from Chicago's West Side. We aimed to "open up another front in the anti-imperialist war...to force them to watch their backs whenever the colonies here and overseas explode." In Chicago, white anti-imperialists invaded the National Guard Armory and taverns in the area, trying to persuade the Guard to refuse to fight for Mayor Daley against Black people. They also refused bail when arrested so there would be less room in the jails for Black arrestees. In that same *Movement* issue, in order to emphasize Cuba's support for the Black liberation struggle, we reprinted a statement made by Fidel Castro in response to the rumor that King's assassin had escaped to Cuba. In that statement Fidel committed to returning M.L. King's murderer to be tried by Black revolutionaries, not "the Yankee Courts."

Cuba labeled 1968 "The Year of the Heroic Guerrilla", in honor of Che Guevara. The year began with the Tet Offensive in Viet Nam when the National Liberation Front (Viet Cong) led armed uprisings in every city in South Viet Nam, capped by a brief seizure of the US Embassy in Saigon. The Tet Offensive announced to the world that the US—even with its half million troops on the ground and the most advanced military technology ever invented—could be defeated. At the same time, colonized people in Angola, Mozambique, Guinea-Bissau, Namibia, Zimbabwe and Palestine had taken up arms to get rid of their European overlords. Ireland too heeded the call to "create two, three many Viet Nams." In Brazil, Uruguay, Chile, and Guatemala urban and rural guerrilla organizations fought against dictators supported and controlled by the US: "more Viet Nams."

In May 1968, students in France triggered occupations of universities, factories, and general strikes that nearly brought down the government. Young people in Japan and Germany formed "Red Armies" to join this worldwide war against imperialism. Students occupied Columbia

University to force an end to the University grabbing more land in Harlem and to cut Columbia's ties with a think tank serving the occupation of Viet Nam.

At *The Movement* office, we prided ourselves on covering the flood of uprisings in depth, to share lessons that would be useful to others in struggle. Sooner or later, militant organizers of most of these struggles came through *The Movement* office. By spring of 1968, our office had become both a publicity hub and "new left" neutral territory where spokespeople from various ideological factions counted on getting fair coverage. Often, they crashed on our living room couch. I remember June 6, 1968, watching Robert F. Kennedy's assassination with a comrade from the German SDS on our small black and white TV.

A few weeks later, the war returned to the East Bay. On June 25, Richmond police killed a fifteen year-old Black child. Enraged, people in the Black communities of the Iron Triangle and North Richmond blocked traffic, threw rocks and set fires. White merchants and politicians called in the National Guard. Local Black leaders invited the Black Panther Party from Oakland to help defend the community.

Three days later, on Friday evening, a predominantly white crowd, maybe 1000 of us, gathered on Telegraph Avenue, near the UC Berkeley campus, to demonstrate against the racist police and in solidarity with the students and workers on strike in France. As our peaceful rally wound down, Berkeley police declared our gathering an "illegal assembly." They gave us no time to disperse before they lobbed volleys of tear gas canisters in quick succession. We were trapped in a terrifying haze that left us blind, choking, and coughing, with nostrils, sinuses, mouths, windpipes and lungs on fire. I knew if I didn't escape the gas, I would die. I grabbed someone's arm whose flannel shirt felt like cool silk and managed to whisper, "Can you see how to get off Telegraph onto Channing?"

"I think so," she rasped back. "We're only a few steps from the corner."

"Can you lead me?" I pleaded. "I can't see at all."

Soon she led me up the stairs on the side of a storefront to an apartment of another stranger who was giving sanctuary to refugees from the tear gas. The gas had wafted onto Channing and into her apartment. Our

host passed out wet rags to the ten or twelve of us who crowded into her living room. Those who could talk debated whether to open the windows to clear out the gas or keep them shut to prevent more gas from entering. I just sat there, struggling to breathe, struggling against nausea, with tears streaming down my cheeks.

"What's happening outside?" I managed to ask when I was finally able to speak and recognized a woman who was a veteran of many of our anti-war marches. I paraphrased her proud response in an article I wrote the next day:

"Our people are finally fighting back. Everyone is sick of giving into the police. It's not right for the Black people of Richmond and the other ghettoes to be the only ones to risk their skins. People have broken into small groups to build barricades, set them on fire to stop the movement of the police. They won't run us off the streets without a fight, not this time."

Although I felt shaky and exhausted from the gas, I willed myself to get up, thanked our host and returned to the fray to find Lincoln, Joe and other comrades who were probably building barricades. By the time I found them, the crowd had thinned. It was time to go home, regroup and plan for the next day's battle.

On Saturday night we were ready. By 8:00PM almost 2,000 of us, many wearing helmets, and gas masks, took Telegraph Avenue. We stockpiled our "ammo": piles of bricks, bottles and rocks. I caught a glimpse of a few who carried Molotov cocktails. Without warning, shortly before midnight, the cops attacked, firing tear gas grenades. Rather than attempt to arrest us, their only objective was to beat us and send as many as possible to the hospital. One cop suffered burns to his legs when a Molotov cocktail hit him. The City Manager declared a state of emergency and imposed a curfew on the area around Telegraph Avenue south of the campus.

All day Sunday, before attempting to return to Telegraph that night, we met in our living room to figure out our next moves. Our affinity group—me, Lincoln, a couple of other people from *The Movement*—had joined the street action because we thought this was a way to put rhetoric about "fighting the system" and "creating many Viet Nams" into practice. We reprinted a photo of a hand-drawn poster carried by someone in

the street that read, "Che lives here and in Paris." Across that street, the reformist leadership of the initial rally in solidarity with French workers had strung a banner declaring, "Free Speech, Free Assembly, Free Huey." (Huey Newton was the Black Panther Party leader whose trial for allegedly killing a cop was to start the following week.) These slogans competed to define the political meaning of the nation's "first new leftist white riot." We aimed to expand the street battles. If more would join us, more would understand that we weren't just fighting for the right to assemble for a street carnival on July 4. We decided to prepare a large one-page wall poster/broadsheet that we would plaster all over Berkeley. We called it *Barricade*.

Meanwhile, on Sunday, the curfew turned Telegraph Avenue into a no-go zone. But a guitar player—a long-haired pied piper—strolled up University Avenue, outside the curfew zone. As he sang the Dylan song, "The Times They Are a-Changin'," several hundred of us followed him. By the time we had passed, the windows of a Firestone Tire distributor, a jewelry store, the Ford Motors showroom, realtors, insurance companies, banks were all shattered. There was not a cop in sight. They were all busy trying to seal off Telegraph Avenue.

When the cops finally did catch up with us, hundreds of white middle-class commuters and shoppers on the streets, without intending to, served as human shields for us. The cops dared not gas Berkeley's respectable taxpayers. Within a couple of hours, the City Manager extended the curfew to the entire city. They called in the Highway Patrol to close the freeway exits that funneled cars into Berkeley. By 11:00PM, the entire city was sealed off. Cops maintained checkpoints throughout the city. They turned Berkeley into an occupied zone, a jail, on lockdown. Professors and shopkeepers alike ended up siding with us protestors and street people in a common resentment of martial law. We felt triumphant.

For nearly a week, our little affinity group from *The Movement* spent our days planning, writing, laying out the *Barricade* and our nights in the streets. Although we didn't sign any of the articles, we assumed the local "Red Squad" or the FBI knew what we were doing. Every time we used the phone we heard clicking and breathing. Several times, when we tried to ask the printer a question critical to meeting our deadline, the phone

line would go completely dead. Despite the surveillance, by July 5, we managed to post hundreds of copies around town.

Adapting the model set by the Black Panther Party Program, our broadsheet declared: "Our struggle is about peoples' control of our community. This means that the cops are disarmed. This means that the city of Berkeley abolishes its draft board..." We also proudly reprinted a congratulatory message from Huey Newton who was in jail awaiting trial:

"They, the white radicals in Berkeley realize the American system is the real enemy—but in order to attack the American system, they must attack the ordinary cop...just as the Vietnamese people, in order to attack American imperialism, must attack the ordinary soldier."

Within months, J. Edgar Hoover declared the Black Panther Party the "greatest threat to the internal security of the US," probably to justify the undeclared war the FBI and police had been waging on the Panthers since 1967. Together, they murdered at least 30 Black Panthers between 1967 and 1969. At its peak, the Party had 38 chapters—from Oakland to New York, San Diego to Seattle, Chicago to New Orleans. And as the chapters grew, so did police raids and assaults on Panther offices, homes, and even churches friendly to the Party. By the end of 1969, nearly every office had been raided—some two and three times.

Oakland Police shot up the National Headquarters when the court delivered a verdict in Huey Newton's trial that didn't mete out the punishment the cops thought he deserved. On various pretenses, they raided the San Francisco Office, the West Oakland Office and the Richmond Office. In Los Angeles, 400 police staged a military assault and in Detroit 600 police destroyed the office there.

Before those assaults, Panther offices, breakfast programs, and political education sessions had been centers of community pride and power—liberated territory of sorts. The National Headquarters on Shattuck in North Oakland was a large, old, two-story house built on top of a storefront, which was open to the public. I had always looked forward to the times I went to the Headquarters to pick up a stack of *The Black Panther*, the Party's newspaper, to deliver a pile of the latest issue of *The Movement,* to pick up a press release or batch of "Free Huey" buttons or to interview someone.

In those days, the task of typesetting weighed down production of both *The Movement* and *The Black Panther*. We had to pay a commercial shop to type up our copy. Then, we proofread the galleys and had to wait and pay more to have the shop type the corrections. We kept a stack of old galleys because it was easier to surgically cut out a few letters and paste them where the corrections were needed than to send the copy back to the shop. The Panther editorial group also wrestled with balky typesetting equipment. Eventually *The Movement* received a donation of improved second-hand typesetting equipment. We, in turn, offered the equipment to the Black Panther Party, to produce their weekly, as long as they let us use it once a month.

This arrangement brought me to the Panther Headquarters for several days each month. The Panthers produced their newspaper in the Ministry of Information—which was upstairs above the storefront on Shattuck. The Ministry of Information also housed a kitchen and communal living space, which served overtime as the area for political education sessions for cadre, childcare, and sleeping. Only select members were allowed entry. They arranged the typesetting machine, layout tables, photo files, press-type—all the newspaper production equipment—in the living room at the front of the house. To protect against another police assault, metal plates and sandbags covered the windows and walls. No daylight could enter. It felt like a fortress.

When we needed to use the equipment we called the officer-of-the-day to check on availability. Then we made sure to arrive a couple of minutes early to give us time to climb the steep, rickety stairs in the back of the house that led directly to the Ministry. The door at the top of the stairs was locked, night and day. As I climbed the stairs, I grew more nervous. If the person on the other side of the peephole didn't recognize me, they might think I was some sort of a spy or cop, and react accordingly. This was my main fear, but once I settled into the work, I felt safe and honored to be treated as a comrade.

One afternoon, in late June 1968, Eldridge Cleaver visited our house to meet with some people from the national SDS office who were staying there. He was out on bail for charges stemming from the shooting when police killed Bobby Hutton. He expected that the judge would rule against him, revoke his parole and order him directly back to Folsom

Prison. When he heard that I would be leaving in a few weeks for Cuba as part of a National SDS delegation, he pulled on my arm, "Let's go outside for a second. I need to rap in private."

Our house had a front porch overgrown with wonderfully fragrant jasmine trees. As I inhaled the jasmine, Eldridge lit a cigarette and ducked as he moved to the far end of the porch. No one could hear us, but he whispered anyway. "Those muthafuckas will never get me back in that prison again. Never. No matter what. I ain't going back." I wondered why he was telling me this. He paused. Maybe he was weighing whether he could trust me. "I need you to take a message to Cuba for me. Tell them I'm coming. Will you do that for me? For the Party. For the revolution."

"Of course," I agreed.

We all knew that Cuba had given sanctuary to Robert F. Williams and revolutionaries in exile from around the world. I relished the chance to make such a significant contribution to the revolution. The prospect of serving as a courier for the man who had been critical to building the Black Panther Party gave me added determination to leave graduate school. I had been weighing the decision for months. I felt progressively alienated from my former mentor, Davey, as he became more deeply immersed in academia. I had growing contempt for academics who spent their lives analyzing ever smaller segments of social issues—their drive to make "original" contributions to a body of knowledge overtook any commitment to change the system. Lincoln and his father argued for my staying—I was so far along and a PhD would give me legitimacy and leverage which could be a valuable resource in the revolutionary struggle. I countered that I already had a Masters degree, which qualified me to teach in a Junior College—which was where the working class students were. This was not a time to spend years preparing to be a professor. After all, with the struggle intensifying in Viet Nam, in Africa, in South America and against the imperial system inside the US, teaching at a university for a bunch of bourgeois students was not a priority.

Besides, I was part of the movement that believed that within five years or so, led by the Black Liberation Movement, we would have a revolutionary government in power. I could serve that government just as well without a PhD. More importantly: I had messages to deliver and barricades to build—there just wasn't time to study for oral exams.

HAVANA, Cuba, August 1968. The Organization in Solidarity with the People of Asia, Africa and Latin America (OSPAAAL) declared August 18, the Anniversary of the Watts Uprising (Los Angeles, 1965), "International Day of Solidarity with the African American People." Arlene received this poster as a gift during a meeting with OSPAAAL representatives.

Cinco Picos, Cuba (1968)

During the summer of 1968, I did not join the battle when the Chicago police rioted in the streets during the Democratic Party Convention. Instead, I gnawed on my fingernails, squinting at a snowy TV screen in a sweaty recreation center on the Isle of Youth, Cuba. I was in the midst of a crowd of young Cuban women transfixed by the sight of police pummeling white North American women their own age on orders of Mayor Daley. I searched the screen, in vain, for familiar faces of friends. Hopefully their absence from the TV screen meant they were safe.

Yet, I knew that none of us would be safe for very long. During the hot summers before and after Martin Luther King was assassinated, police and National Guard shot thousands of Black people on the streets of countless US cities. The war against Viet Nam raged on, despite the Tet Offensive that served notice that the US Army would never win. Hundreds of thousands of students and workers in Brazil, Mexico, France and Germany joined demonstrations, riots and strikes that paralyzed their countries. In strikes and takeovers on many US campuses, anchored by Columbia University on the East coast and San Francisco State on the West Coast, students risked beatings, prison and losing their diplomas. Many were members of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS)—our movement of white youth committed to fight for Black and other Ethnic Studies programs and to stop Harlem land grabs by Columbia University. Che's death inspired us to sacrifice. At rallies we chanted, along with the Panthers: *"Revolution has come//Time to pick up the gun."* We never considered that Che's death might teach us that defeat of the US war machine would be a lot more complicated than simply picking up the gun.

Those were heady times.

Armed with issues of *The Barricade* covering "the Battle of Berkeley," our National SDS Delegation to the 26th of July Celebrations traveled to Cuba via Mexico. When we went for our visas, CIA agents with cameras planted outside the Cuban Embassy in Mexico City did not deter us. We were accustomed to having our phones bugged and cars followed. We routinely avoided saying anything on the phone that might be useful to the police. Those plain white Ford Fairlanes made no attempt to disguise their business as they pulled away from the curb at the corner of my street each time I left my house. So we took pains to take circuitous routes to sensitive meetings. J. Edgar Hoover had declared war on the Black Panther Party and anyone who supported them. If we had been older, perhaps the stress might have given us all high blood pressure. During the short flight from Mexico City to Havana, I felt my siege mentality begin to lift.

"Welcome to the first liberated territory of the Americas."

It thrilled me that this was an official banner, not one we made for a protest, which greeted us after we landed at José Martí International Airport. When our delegation of six SDS militants arrived, Cuban officials welcomed us as visiting dignitaries. Before we even left the airport, our hosts hugged and plied us with daiquiris. I wore my "Free Huey" pin wherever I went. And for the first time in years, I felt safe, relaxed, protected—not harassed, by uniformed men carrying guns.

ICAP—Cuban Institute for Friendship with the People—arranged for us to stay, for free, at the Habana Libre (formerly the Hilton). That summer, it seemed like representatives of every revolutionary movement in the world gathered in the lobby of the Havana Libre. After our days of touring and interviews, Brazilians, Mexicans, Palestinians, Angolans, Algerians, Congolese, Laotians, Germans, French—we all hung out in that lobby with the ghosts of Meyer Lansky and other mafia bosses whom the Revolution had expelled. Routinely, we talked until dawn, sharing stories behind the headlines of our latest battles, debating interpretations of Che's Diary or Ho Chi Minh's writings, pledging solidarity, and reassuring each other of the certainty of our victory.

Since our delegation came from "the belly of the beast," our new *compañero*s often plied us with questions, for insight into our common

enemy. We also learned from their experience: how protestors protected themselves against brutal attacks by the Brazilian Army during their demonstrations in Rio; how Palestinians were resuming resistance in Gaza; and how students gained the trust of workers in Paris. And, although it did not occur to me at the time, now I assume that at least some of the attention they gave me was due to the fact that I was one of the only women in the room.

One morning after one of these all-nighters, our Cuban guides rushed into the lobby, eager to share their good news. Our delegation had been invited to climb the Cinco Picos. We would be the first North Americans to accomplish the pilgrimage to the summit of Cuba's tallest mountain, Pico Turquino. "It is an honor," they enthused, speaking too fast for us to interrupt with questions, "to follow the route of the journey made by the survivors of the Granma landing. The very same climb over the Sierra Maestra that broke the encirclement of Batista's Army."

This climb was now part of the Cuban Army's basic training and a rite of passage for aspiring revolutionaries. Along the mountain route, through jungle and mountain wilderness, accessible only on foot, we would have the chance to meet some of the peasants who, only a decade earlier, had given sanctuary to Fidel or Che during their guerrilla war.

The next day we crammed into a 1959 Cadillac and, for hours, drove eastward from Havana, through the lush countryside towards the foothills of the Sierra. The plan was to begin hiking before sunrise the following day. Climbing in the tropical summer sun was unthinkable. But the jeep taking us to the trailhead and our army guide didn't arrive until mid-morning. By the time we loaded our gear into the jeep, and drove a few miles to the trailhead at the end of the road, the sun blazed, without evaporating any of the tropical humidity.

We grunted as we heaved backpacks onto our shoulders. They each contained a five-day supply of Soviet canned food, chocolate and water that made our loads weigh at least 40 pounds. Our boots were brand new, made from some rigid, leather-like material. In addition to our two ICAP guides, Edmundo and Carlos, an officer from the Army, Roberto, joined us. We began with the five of our delegation who remained in Cuba

which included me and Evie. She was based in Chicago and, in addition to SDS, she had joined the Westside Group, an independent women's liberation discussion group based in Hyde Park that eventually grew into the Chicago Women's Liberation Union.

We had taken only a few steps when Evie's pale white skin turned red, her legs buckled and she hit the ground. I let the stiff canvas backpack slide off my shoulders onto the dusty ground as we all rushed to help her onto her feet. Edmundo turned his canteen of water upside down over her head and offered her salt pills. Evie declined. "Save them. You all will need them more than me. I can't climb anywhere." Roberto, relieved to be rid of a woman who would inevitably slow the group down, offered to take her back to the base camp and catch up with us later. With Evie's agreement, we headed off in opposite directions.

The three SDS men from our delegation, Edmundo and Carlos, took off before I had a chance to reload the forty-pound pack onto my back. I ran to catch up to them. By the time I narrowed the gap between us to maybe a hundred feet, my jeans, underpants, bra and long-sleeve work shirt were thoroughly saturated with sweat. Panting, I managed to yell, "Hey guys, wait up. *Por favor*." Grudgingly, they stopped. As soon as I caught up to them, they resumed their climb, leaving me no time to catch my breath. In those days, I smoked two packs of cigarettes a day and even though I was only twenty-five years old, I felt like an ancient woman coughing and gasping for air. In no time, those non-smoking men with longer legs left me in the dust. I was so far behind, I could hardly see them. Sweating, coughing, unable to catch my breath, I dropped my backpack, sat down and planned to turn around to join Evie as soon as I recovered enough strength to stand. I did not have the breath to whisper, let alone call for help.

At that moment, Roberto returned from base, striding in my direction as if he were a conquering hero. I smiled meekly, hating that I needed his help. He ignored my outstretched arm and yelled to the other men. He did not, as I expected, ask them to wait for me. Instead, without another glance in my direction, he yelled through his sneer, "I told you we shouldn't try to bring these weak women. Look at her. She looks worse than my grandmother before she died. Women will never belong in the guerrilla. She must go back." I wondered

why he apparently hadn't heard about Celia Sánchez and Haydée Santamaria.[9]

Torn between sobbing and screaming, I just sat there. The muscles in my legs had turned to pudding. But Roberto's contempt infuriated me and that fury gave me just enough energy to drag myself up from the ground, hoist the backpack onto my shoulders and resume my solitary march, past him towards the others. I would prove to that macho asshole that he was wrong about women. No matter what, I would not allow him the satisfaction of seeing me give up.

This time, when I caught up to the men, Carlos offered me water, then Edmundo pleaded gently, "Arlene. Please go back. I don't want to be responsible for you hurting yourself. Please."

Then, willing myself to sound much more confident than I was, I sputtered, "Don't worry about me. I think I coughed all the mucus out of my system. I won't smoke any more. I'll be fine. Besides, you need me," I paused and smiled. "I'm the only one who can write a first-hand woman's account of her climb for *The Movement* newspaper."

Roberto countered. "Fucking woman, we have no time to pamper her." His refusal to concede gave me more time to rest and strengthened my resolve to prove he was wrong. Again, Edmundo tried to reason with me. "This will be the last place you'll be able to turn around. Once we get to the steeper part, it will only be possible to go forward and up. We can crawl up, but not down on this side of this mountain. Only after we reach the summit can we descend again. The other side of the mountain is not so steep."

"I can do it. Let's go," I announced. I knew the longer they tried to persuade me to turn back, the harder it would be for me to retain my anger-fueled determination. So, with Roberto grumbling about the "*chica loca*," we set off again.

My cough tapered off, but I continued to sweat profusely. Too soon, I felt the scalding pain of blisters—first on the sides of my little toes and later on the tops of all my toes. There was no padding under the straps

9 The two women who fought alongside Fidel in the Sierra. My 1968 interview with Haydée Santamaria can be found at http://freedomarchives.org/Documents/Finder/DOC40_scans/40.Movement.November.1968.pdf

of the backpack and they dug burning grooves into the skin on the sides of my bra straps. Pain in my feet and shoulders slowed my pace. Again, within minutes, I dropped behind the men. Nevertheless, this time, thanks to their slowing pace, I kept them in sight.

I saw them bend and then drop to their knees as they crawled up an exceptionally steep section of the trail. I followed their example. I didn't mind crawling; it relieved some of the pressure off my toes and shoulders. At the first relatively flat spot, they stopped to rest. I caught up to them and gulped more water from my canteen. Again, they took off before I could hoist my backpack into position. At that moment, I flashed on a plan.

Why not ditch the canned food. I could not eat it anyway. Chocolate and water would do. The Soviet containers felt like they were made of lead, not tin. Without those 20 or 30 pounds, I figured, my shoulders would recover and I could climb faster—maybe even catch up to

SIERRA MAESTRA, Cuba, August 1968. Near school at Minas del Frio, the remains of the "Commander's headquarters of the immortal Che Guevara" are preserved.

the men. For an instant, I felt a pang of guilt about abandoning perfectly good food, knowing it was being rationed in Cuban cities. So I arranged the cans neatly in two piles on the side of the path in plain view. One of the students at the teacher training school at the top of the mountain would surely pass by in a few days and retrieve the cans.

This time, when I resumed climbing, the relief I felt on my shoulders made me giddy. For the first time, I looked out over the edge of the path. The beauty of the tree tops of jungle foliage surprised me. How could such beauty co-exist with the pain and exhaustion I was feeling? I was accustomed to the dry monochrome hills of California. Here, tropical flowers—glistening purples, reds, yellows—and huge vivid green leaves framed a spectacular view of distant peaks.

The men took a couple of minutes to rest every half hour or so. During that time I caught up to them. We would exchange a few words about the heat or the scenery. No one had the strength for serious conversation. We were all sweating so much, no one needed to pee. Too soon, Roberto gave the signal to resume climbing. However, the established pattern changed imperceptibly. The men's stride slowed. Mine quickened as the sun began to set.

We were all exhausted, but my pack was lighter and I had learned how to maintain my pace. My toes were numb. Despite the loss of baggage, I still needed to protect my shoulders from the digging straps of the backpack. So I hooked my thumbs under the straps and willed myself to focus on putting one foot in front of the other. Small steps. Right. Left. Ignore the pain. Small steps. Right Left. Ignore the scenery. Small steps. Right. Left. Right. Left. For hours. I released my thumbs only when I needed my hands to crawl up the steepest parts of the mountain.

As I reached and passed Joe, the man in the group with the shortest legs, I felt an unfamiliar exhilaration and strength. I had only been aware of the overwhelming task of putting one foot in front of the other and proving a woman could match a man on the trail. As I passed Joe, I had no more to prove—only a task to finish. My pace quickened as I passed another man.

The plan was for us to arrive at Minas del Frío, the peak, before darkness, spend the night, and resume our descent the next morning. Since

we had started behind schedule, we climbed the last couple of hours in darkness. By then, I was marching near the front of our single file, just behind Roberto who was the only one with a flashlight to illuminate the path. As we neared the summit, the ground grew flatter.

I thought about a popular slogan on New Left posters: "A true revolutionary is guided by feelings of love." I fought my urge to gloat. I could join the young Cubans who volunteered to become teachers. Their isolation and spartan dormitories were designed to acclimate mostly urban youth to the harsh conditions of rural life and to educate them to respect the peasants they would be teaching. I would also be ready to sacrifice for the revolution.

When we arrived at Minas, Jorge, a tall, Afrodescendant Cuban in an army uniform greeted us. He seemed the polar opposite of Roberto. Holding me in his gaze, he enthusiastically applauded our accomplishment. Jorge would be our guide for the next stage of the Cinco Picos trek. He suggested that rather than leave in the early morning as planned—since we arrived so late—that we delay our departure until the following evening so we could descend the mountain in the coolness of night. Everyone but Roberto agreed.

Some of the students brought us stew, in silence. We were too tired to do anything more than raise spoons to our mouths. As I ate, a young woman noticed that my thumbs were bloody where the straps of the backpack had rubbed the skin raw. She brought me a basin of warm water and some soap and carefully washed the wounds. Each time I winced, she apologized, and, as if she were my mother and I was still five, she held my hand firmly in the water. Before I left the men to sleep on the women's side of the dorm, Jorge advised me, "Compañera, sleep in your boots. I know it sounds crazy, but trust me. Your feet will be in much better condition for the climb tomorrow if you keep your boots on."

I tried to follow his advice. But as I lay on my back on the bottom of a two-tier bunk bed, the throbbing from my molten feet made sleep impossible. Finally, I unlaced those cursed boots, pulled them off and dropped them on the floor. The throbbing turned into burning, but I was too tired to get up to soak my feet. Before I could enjoy the pride of being the first North American woman to climb the first of Cinco Picos, I was asleep.

SIERRA MAESTRA, Cuba, August 1968. Jorge, a veteran of the 26th of July Movement and guerrilla war against Batista in Oriente Province, was the guide for the SDS Delegation's descent from "Cinco Picos".

MINAS DEL FRIO, SIERRA MAESTRA, Cuba, August 1968. After climbing to Minas del Frio, Arlene's SDS delegation spent a day at that School that trained literacy teachers. The teachers-in-training also learned self-defense against counter-revolutionaries who might be operating in the countryside.

The next morning, a terrible weight in my feet woke me. Blood from the blisters on my toes had hardened and cracked and my feet had ballooned to twice their normal size. It was inconceivable to put on my boots. Inconceivable and impossible. I hobbled barefoot into the dining room, not yet alarmed by my inflated feet. Surely, there would be an extra pair of larger-sized boots I could borrow. Jorge's beautiful smile was gone. "No, boots are very scarce. We ration them. There are no extra pairs here of any size."

I spent the day wincing, as I soaked my burning, bulging feet in salt water. I prayed for them to shrink to normal size before it was time to leave the comfort of the camp. During that time, Jorge—whose home was in Santiago—told me about how his family had participated in the 26th of July uprisings there. When street protests became too dangerous, he joined the guerrilla in the mountains. Thinking about how I lagged behind the group most of the previous day, I asked him, "What happened in the real war when someone was slower than the rest?" His response became a mantra for me—one I would refer to whenever I felt my competitive tendencies emerge from the cave I tried to lock them in. "The pace of the guerrilla must be the pace of the slowest *guerrillero*.[10] We need unity more than speed."

10 Guerrilla means guerrilla unit. *Guerrillero* is the individual warrior.

Going out with a Bang in Flint (1969)

It was the last weekend of December 1969, and the last weekend of the decade. All night, the intrepid Greyhound plowed against the blizzard that howled through the plains, from Chicago to Flint. At dawn, we finally emerged from the bus's cocoon onto an empty gray and frigid street outside the closed bus terminal. The grimy sign said South Dort Avenue. Lincoln and I huddled close against the wind, consulting our travel instructions. Falling snow threatened to cover the backpacks and sleeping bags that we had dropped on the sidewalk.

Fortunately, before we froze trying to decide whether to walk up or down the street, an elderly Black man with the collar of a navy peacoat pulled up to his mouth, greeted us,

"Mornin'. You people ain't from around here are ya?"

I smiled and nodded and readjusted my scarf to defend against the cold.

"Good morning." Lincoln answered.

"You must be looking for the Giant Ballroom. There's been a bunch of out-of-town kids headin' there since yesterday."

I hesitated to answer, weighing the risk of admitting our destination. We had heard that the Flint police knew that hundreds of SDS radicals planned to meet in their town and were detaining all cars with out-of-state plates. Yet this man, with the gloveless, gnarled hands of a laborer, had to work for General Motors, not the cops. He offered to ask his cabbie cousin to drive us the two miles to the Ballroom.

Before I could refuse the offer, Lincoln intervened.

"Sure. Thank you, sir. That would be great." He always found it easier to spend money than I did.

The cousin came in his own red Buick, not a taxi. The car's heater and radio were blasting. I suggested that he drop us off a few blocks from the Ballroom so the cops who had staked out the place wouldn't take down his license plate number. He nodded. And spoke to us in the rearview mirror, apparently relieved at the opening I gave him: "I heard a rumor that you kids wanna blow up the Fisher Body Plant."

Lincoln pinched my thigh. "No way. Not us." Lincoln insisted, a little too emphatically.

I chimed in, "Well, you know, they tell a lot of lies about us. They don't want to believe we're just students and workers who are fed up with the war and racism." I often felt uncomfortable talking to Black people about racism. I hoped he didn't think I was paternalistic. "Some people there may want to blow up a police station—you know, especially after the cops murdered Fred Hampton, but they would never blow up a factory where Black people work."

Lincoln added, "We're journalists. We write about stuff. We don't bomb anything."

Laughing, the driver pulled to the side of the road and turned off the ignition. "Alright, folks. The Ballroom is two blocks in front of us."

"Thanks, how much do we owe you?" Lincoln fumbled for his wallet under his parka.

"The ride is on the house."

"Please let us pay something. We dragged you out the house on a Saturday morning, after all. At least we can cover the gas."

"I tell you what," he grinned. "you all get Nixon to keep these plants open and stop sending us to die in the Nam. I'll take that as payment." And he reached over the front seat to release the back door handle and shook our hands.

"Cool." I said. Part of me—the part that identified with Weatherman's faith that national liberation movements would dance on the grave

of imperialism—took the driver's words as proof that the Black liberation movement was winning. The part that had been tutored by Leibel Bergman and had studied history and sociology drained my confidence. I wondered if we could save anyone's job, let alone a life. I reached into my huge purse and handed him a copy of the latest issue of *The Movement*. A drawing of Fred Hampton filled the front page. He glanced at the cover and stuffed the paper under his seat.

"Thanks for the paper. Now you take care."

"You too, and happy New Year." The end of the decade was only four days away.

❧

As we entered the Giant Ballroom, both of us began coughing. The noxious air from the exhales of 400 chain-smokers, recirculated through an ancient heating system, had rushed into our lungs. A couple of women I knew from meetings in Chicago stood as sentries a few feet inside the door, prepared to frisk us for weapons and drugs. As I waited for them to finish patting Lincoln down, my coughing continued.

It was morning, but no daylight entered the giant room that looked more like an insulated plane hangar than a dance hall. Except this plane hangar had been decorated for a revolutionary carnival. A colossal cardboard AK47 hung from the ceiling and repeating posters of the martyred Fred Hampton filled one wall. Portraits of Malcolm X, Ho Chi Minh, Che Guevara, Mao Zedong, and V.I. Lenin were taped along the eye-level length of another wall.

Sly and the Family Stone's "Thank You (Falettinme Be Mice Elf Agin)" was blasting from the sound system while couples and singles dancing in the center of the floor drowned out Sly's lyrics with their own, "Che, viva, viva, viva Che," over and over. It was the first time I ever saw women dancing with women, men dancing with men outside a gay bar.

Piles of backpacks and sleeping bags, some encasing people who were still asleep, formed a kind of barricade around the dance floor close to the walls. I noticed a small snack bar in one corner and remembered I was starving. Lincoln saw it too. "Let's find a place to put our stuff and get something to eat."

"I gotta pee before anything." I pointed towards a gap in the line of sleeping bags against the back wall. "You grab that space for our stuff and I'll meet you at the snack bar."

I headed towards the "Ladies" sign at the opposite corner of the floor, nodding "hello" to people whose names I had forgotten but whose faces I recognized. As I opened the door, the stench of too many women's excretions hit me. Most people had been at the Conference for less than 24 hours and the toilets in all the stalls were already clogged. I held my breath. Mechanically I told myself, "If the Vietnamese can live for months in caves to escape US bombing, I can stand a few days without plumbing."

When I emerged from the bathroom, the cigarette haze gave me relief. On my way to the snack bar, Julie N. stood in my path. We hugged.

"Hey, Arlene. What are you doin' here? After that last editorial you ran in *The Movement*, I figured you disapproved of Weathermen too much to join us here."

Ordinarily, I wouldn't bother to explain, but Julie was one of my favorite SDS women. Tall, brilliant and blunt. She frightened most men and seemed totally comfortable with her independence. Like me, she was a few years older than most of the new SDS recruits—a grad school drop out. Her studies and fluency in Spanish made her SDS's leading expert on Cuba and Puerto Rico. After I returned from Cuba in the fall of 1968, we had worked closely, with Phil Hutchings from SNCC, on organizing the first Venceremos Brigade.

"What editorial are you talking about? The one from last August where we argued against sectarianism and correct lineism—to avoid an SDS split?"

"No, more recent. The one that trashed Weatherman for not defending the Panthers."

"Yeah, we thought the National Office and some chapters were kinda arrogant, implying the Panthers were being 'reformist' in trying to build the United Front Against Fascism. After all, the police and FBI have been murdering and jailing Panthers, not SDS members." I had to admit I enjoyed political sparring with Julie. "One of the reasons we came

was because Bernardine told me they were very self-critical about not giving more support to the Panthers."

Julie switched up. "Well, I'm glad you're here. Are you gonna join a collective?"

"I don't think so. We're mainly here because we were already in Chicago to get new distributors and contributors for the newspaper. You know, it's been hard to keep up circulation. Chapters that want to read about organizing factory workers, don't want to read about bombing statues of pigs and chapters that want to read about the 'Days of Rage' - when Weathermen leaders publicly summoned several hundred sacrificial young white people to Chicago to destroy property and battle police - don't want any news about organizing unemployed whites. As long as we were in Chicago, we figured we should come to Flint so we could cover the 'War Council' in our next issue."

"Well, welcome. I hope you change your mind. We could use more people like you and Lincoln in our collectives. Sooner or later you gotta decide which side you're on. What are you waiting for? You, of all people know the revolution won't wait."

"Julie, tell me honestly. You've studied the Cuban Revolution, you're closer to the Puerto Rican liberation movement than anyone here. You know their revolutions had a lot more popular support than this. Do you really think we're ready 'to pick up the gun' as they say?" I pointed to the seven-foot long cardboard AK47 dangling from the ceiling.

Julie ushered me away from a cluster of people who were singing like a bunch of drunks, "I see a bad moon a-rising'/I see trouble on the way..." "Of course," she admitted. "In Cuba, in Puerto Rico they have the workers and peasants on their side. But we're in the belly of the beast here. It's different. The workers will come along once we show them we're serious. They know imperialism is their enemy. They just don't see a way to fight it."

"Maybe." I was relieved that at least she wasn't spouting the Weatherman line that Black and Brown people inside and outside the US could bring down the system without any white people—that all white workers, even children, were the enemy.

Lincoln approached us with one hand outstretched offering me a hot dog and the other holding a cup of orange soda. "Julie," he grinned. "what brings you out of the tropics to these parts?"

She shrugged and waved. "Let's talk more later. I gotta go to a meeting."

I felt a sore throat coming on. "They didn't have any orange juice?"

"Nah, only soda: Coke, Doctor Pepper and Orange."

"I'm gonna need some vitamin C. I thought I put some in my purse, but I can't find it."

Bernardine Dohrn, the national leader of SDS, wandered out of the crowd towards us. "Glad you guys made it. I wasn't sure if you would." She kissed me on the cheek, and Lincoln on the lips—a kiss that lingered too long, I thought.

Only a few weeks earlier, she and Jeff, her lover, who was also part of the national leadership they called "The Weather Bureau," had stayed in our living room in Berkeley. They were in town to raise money for bail and lawyers. Then, we didn't talk inside the house, only passed notes back and forth because we were sure the house was bugged. When the conversation got too heated or complicated for notes, she announced loudly, "Let's get some air. I need a walk. After Chicago, I really love California weather." When we reached the corner, she lowered her voice, "Don't look now, but see those cars—parked one to your right, one to your left—the brown shoes are in them. It's cool they can't read lips."

I first met Bernardine nearly four years earlier in the spring of 1965. In those days, she was a radical lawyer, sent by the National Lawyers Guild, to report on what was going on in Berkeley. Two men in heated debate about the war stopped in mid-sentence when she walked into the room. With a chiseled beauty, she was striking in a classy, white, silk mini-skirted suit. The deep V-neck of the jacket put her breasts on view. Without self-consciousness, she wore no bra. I had never met a woman like her. That was years before some feminists made free-swinging breasts the fashion. Taking advantage of the silence, she redirected the debate over speakers with a curt challenge, "teach-ins are ok, but when are you gonna take some action? I mean take over the streets til we stop the war?"

"Who is she?" I whispered to the person nearest me. Her self-assurance awed me. I was one of the only women who regularly attended those leadership meetings at my first year in Berkeley. And I rarely trusted my limited experience enough to speak out. Nevertheless, Bernardine must have recognized a potential ally in me and, over the years, we gravitated towards each other. Even though Berkeley never had an active SDS chapter, in 1968 she was the one who arranged for me to join the National Delegation to represent SDS at Cuba's 26th of July celebrations. Now, some eighteen months later, she had turned on her considerable charm and powers of persuasion to convince me and Lincoln to leave our jobs and home in Berkeley, leave our names and possessions and leave our marriage to join the revolutionary underground. I was simultaneously flattered and suspicious.

"Let's go where we can talk." Bernardine had placed herself in the middle of Lincoln and me, looped one of her arms through Lincoln's right and the other through my left and escorted us towards the ladies room. Before we got close enough to smell the stench, she dropped my arm and reached for the knob of an unmarked door. The door opened into a space with concrete walls and floor and a worn-out couch. It might have once been an employees' lounge.

"How many copies of the January issue of *The Movement* did you bring here?"

"Not many: fifty or so. We left 1,000 in Chicago. They were too heavy to carry on the bus."

Bernardine nodded. "You know, I really dug the poem for Fred." Lincoln beamed. "And the article that called for support for Jane and Sam Melville, the New York bombers, was great. And Arlene, the 'Seize the Time' editorial was right on. I should have told you to bring enough copies here to get out to our collectives." Bernardine knew how to make us feel important.

She focused on the support our newspaper gave to the bombings and revolutionary violence in general. She ignored the articles on radical workers' strikes and the part of the editorial that urged Weathermen to abandon their holier-than-thou contempt for legal, non-military organizing. I decided not to let her compliment appease me. "Thanks. But

Bernardine, I thought you guys decided organizing white workers in factories is about increasing white privilege—even though that's what Black comrades have been telling us to do since SNCC?"

"It's more complicated than that." She smiled. "But I want you to know, you don't have to agree on every position for you to join us."

"What about this smash monogamy bullshit?" I blurted as I reached for Lincoln's hand.

Again she smiled. Lincoln folded his legs.

"You know, we don't believe in bourgeois marriage. We don't want women to be men's property and we don't want women asking their husband's permission before they can come to a meeting or an action. We want all our people's first commitment to be to the struggle, to the revolution."

I knew I would sound defensive but I didn't care. I rattled off my arguments. "Malcolm X was married.... Not all marriages are bourgeois.... My husband doesn't control me...."

Lincoln attempted a joke. "Sure don't. Sometimes I wish I could." Bernardine and I looked at each other and rolled our eyes.

She assumed the tone of a slightly impatient schoolteacher. "I know. You two have a special relationship. Of course, if you lived in a collective house, you couldn't live together. But not all Weather people live in collectives. You wouldn't have to if you didn't want to." She looked at her watch. "Think about it. We'll talk more later. I was supposed to meet with the Bureau ten minutes ago." And she rushed out.

Lincoln and I stayed on the couch, staring at her back.

He spoke first. "Arl, what do you think? You seem to be digging all this Weather stuff."

"I don't know what to think. I know we'll never get rid of imperialism by peaceful means. It just seems crazy to think we're ready to pick up guns now."

Lincoln mused. "Were Fidel and Che ready when they began guerrilla warfare with the twenty-six men who survived the Granma landing? Was Mao ready before the Long March? And even the Vietnamese had

no guns of their own when they first attacked the French." Now he was taking the side I usually took. Had he been charmed by Bernardine?

For a few minutes, we went back and forth. Then, I put my hand over his lips. "I can't think about making a decision now. Let's check out some of these meetings." I lit the last cigarette left in the pack of Marlboros I had bought at a bus stop less than ten hours earlier. Lincoln decided to check out a circle of people from various radical newspapers.

I headed in the opposite direction and squeezed into the circle of women scheduled to talk about women's liberation. When I got there, someone from the Pittsburgh Women's Action demanded of those of us in the circle, "Think about the white privileges each and every one of us is hanging onto. We gotta smash white supremacy, starting with ourselves."

Yes, I agreed. But I was skeptical of discussions that never went beyond rhetorical chest-beating, to strategize on how to organize poor white people, especially women. Then the discussion took such a bizarre turn, I was too intrigued to leave.

"You think all white people are the enemy!" A petite white woman with a southern accent yelled. Most of the women in the circle groaned. They obviously thought they had already settled the question.

The Pittsburgh veteran, recently released on bail, snapped, "Well, if ya really wanna know the truth—yes. Any white muthafucker who doesn't join us is an enemy. We gotta off 'em all."

Southern Accent was incredulous. "Even babies. You think you should kill white babies!"

I thought the point was preposterous and waited for Pittsburgh to protest. Instead, without any irony or humor, she snarled. "You know imperialism shows no mercy for Vietnamese babies, or Palestinian babies or even Black babies here. Why show mercy for white babies!"

I had been taking notes and listing counterarguments under the heading, "Peoples' armies must move differently from imperial armies." If this had been an ordinary meeting, I would have raised my hand and ripped her argument to shreds. This time, I just alternated between gnawing my cuticles and puffing on a borrowed cigarette. I was too disgusted and too dizzy from lack of sleep, food and air to say anything.

Someone suggested we limit the smoking in the circle to three people at a time. Everyone agreed. Not an ashtray in sight. I scanned the circle, counted five of us with cigarettes and dropped mine on the floor. So did another woman. Our attempt to clear the air made no difference. Soon no one paid attention to the rule. I lost all sense of time and panicked that I would be trapped in this place for days. Finally, Sly and the Family Stone returned to the loudspeaker—a signal for everyone in the circle to go to their next scheduled meetings without resolving the white baby controversy. I looked for Lincoln, but couldn't find him.

That night I stood at the edge of the crowd as people clapped, whooped and whistled when Bernardine officially opened the War Council.

"*We fucked up. We didn't fight around Bobby Seale when he was shackled at the Conspiracy Trial. We should have torn the courtroom apart. We didn't smash them when the Mobe Peace creeps hissed at David Hilliard on Moratorium Day in San Francisco. We didn't burn Chicago down when Fred was killed...*"

I agreed. I had written an angry editorial in *The Movement*, describing the white left as "political fair-weather friends" for not defending the Black Panthers. I joined in the chanting:

"Avenge Fred Hampton. Avenge Chairman Fred. Avenge Fred Hampton."

Then, as the chanting died down, her insistence that we overcome our "wimpiness" reached an outlandish crescendo. When she emphasized her praise of Charles Manson with "Dig it," I stopped taking her seriously. I didn't believe she believed herself. I went in search of my parka. I needed some fresh air.

When I got to the door the Weatherwomen sentries barred my way.

"Where the hell do you think you're going?" one of them demanded.

"The cigarette machine here is out of Marlboros. Do you know where I can get some?"

"You mean you're gonna leave Bernardine's speech to find some coffin nails!"

SAN FRANCISCO, California, January 1970. At San Francisco County Jail, Arlene consults with Bobby Seale about *THE MOVEMENT* newspaper's coverage of Fred Hampton's murder.

I was losing my patience. "I'm sorry if you disapprove. I'll be back in a minute."

"Look. We're telling you to stay inside for your own safety. The cops have the place staked out. We can't be responsible for raising any more bail."

I imagined myself in an out-of-state jail with no lawyer and no one to call for bail.

"OK. But I do need a cigarette."

The one who had been silent handed me her pack. Pall Malls, Lincoln's brand would have to do.

By then, a Weather Bureau man was leading another round of the "Avenge Fred Hampton" chant. I was trying to figure out what to do next when someone tugged on my sleeve. I turned quickly, ready for a fight. When I saw Phoebe H. standing there, smiling broadly with extended arms, I relaxed and hugged her closely.

Phoebe, a friend from San Francisco, would save me from this madness. And besides, she smoked Marlboros. Phoebe was another SDS woman who I had always liked. I liked her a lot. She was brilliant and had a no-holds-barred sense of humor. Her boyfriend, her other SDS comrades, no one had immunity from her clever barbs. Although she never seemed interested in a by-line, she helped a lot at *The Movement* office, spending hours tying up newspapers in zip-coded bundles, answering mail and proofreading. She was committed to practicing her militant politics and had been arrested during the San Francisco State Strike. I was sure she had no hidden agenda. And although her face was not conventionally beautiful, her curves, beads, miniskirts, tinted hair and *joie de vivre* always fascinated me.

"Oh, Phoebe, I'm glad it's you."

"Who'd you expect?"

"I don't know. Someone with boring rhetoric."

"I can dig it. Hey Arlene. I'm sorry I didn't say bye when I left San Francisco. You know, we had to leave in a hurry."

"I figured. But it must be madness working in the National Office in Chicago."

"Yeah, it was. But I'm not there anymore."

I was surprised. I worried about her dependence on men. She seemed to move to a new town whenever her boyfriend moved. I knew he was still in Chicago.

With no tact, I asked, "Did you and him break up?"

Her smile disappeared. "Not exactly." She paused.

"I guess you don't want to talk about it." I filled the gap in the conversation.

"No, I don't mind. You know what the organization does to couples, don't you?"

I teased. "Phoebe, don't tell me you had to 'smash monogamy'!"

Then she got more serious than I had ever seen her. "It's not funny. We were holding each other back. There was no way for us to go through

the changes we needed to go through to become real revolutionaries as long as we were hanging on to each other."

"Oh Phoebe, not you too!"

"Yes, me too. You know for us to be strong fighters, to smash individualism, we got to build strong collectives. Couples sabotage collective building."

"How?" I challenged and took another cigarette from her pack. She lit it for me.

"Couples are more loyal to each other than to the collective. In the last few months, we've been living in collectives, becoming real comrades, learning to trust each other with our lives."

"So what does that have to do with monogamy?"

"Arlene, you don't get it, do you?"

I exhaled a cloud of smoke, tilted my head and smirked. She grabbed my hand and pulled me down to a chair next to the one she had been resting her foot on. Then she sat down, positioned her chair close to mine and lowered her voice.

"We believe you can't be comrades with someone until you've made love with them."

This was a part of the "smash monogamy" rule I hadn't heard before. I thought they only wanted to break up couples in order to get them to leave their bourgeois comforts. "Shit, Phoebe," I sputtered. "That's ridiculous. You can't be serious. If you have to sleep with someone before you can be comrades, then you're saying women can't be comrades with women, men can't be comrades with men." I was totally sure she would see the logic. Instead she came back stronger than before.

Laughing. "Of course we can. We sleep with women too. The men sleep with men."

I exhaled a long, slow "ohhhhh." The thought had never occurred to me. Up until this conversation with Phoebe, I never questioned my heterosexuality. But in that instant, I found myself looking at Phoebe through a new lens. Stunned, I realized I hoped she might come on to me. I understood myself well enough, as a woman

raised in the 1950s, to recognize I would never take the initiative, but I wanted her to.

Late into that night, we talked about the myth of vaginal orgasm, women being turned-on, not threatened, by strong women, and women's leadership. She finally put a damper on my excitement. "Arlene, it's great rappin' with you, but I gotta get some sleep. I got an eight AM meeting tomorrow." She rose and hugged me.

I didn't let go. "Just one last thing Phoebe. What do you say about this line about killing white babies?"

As she turned in the direction of the ladies room, she declared, "That's ridiculous. Some of the cadre try to psych themselves up to leave their comfortable lives and say anything. But we're not about that. Let's talk more later."

I nodded, frowned, stared after her and finally, with my head crammed with possibilities, headed towards the back of the huge ballroom. I waded through the piles of backpacks and vacant sleeping bags, gingerly stepping around or over occupied sleeping bags. "Where the hell did Lincoln put our stuff?" I had no idea. Then, somewhere in the midst of my second lap around the ballroom, someone who was already lying inside his sleeping bag, grabbed my leg just below the knee. Instinctively I kicked off the unwanted grip.

"Hey, Arlene. Where ya goin'?" I finally wrenched myself free.

"Stay here." I heard a man's voice say.

"Shit," I thought. "The last thing I want to do tonight is sleep with some horny Weatherman from god-knows-where." I tried to wade on, but he grabbed me again. Now I was really pissed and aimed another kick at his head.

"What the hell you doing!" He ducked. "Arlene, what's wrong with you?"

Then, through the fog of my fantasies about Phoebe, I finally recognized my husband's voice. I stammered, "Oh, Lincoln, damn. Sorry, I'm so tired I didn't realize it was you."

"Who the hell do you think it would be!" It was his turn to demand.

"I don't know. No one I guess," as I finally recognized Lincoln and snuggled into the bags he had zipped together to form one double bag. After I settled in, I wrapped myself around him, and kissed the only available skin on the back of his neck. He shrugged, apparently appeased. "I'm wasted. I gotta sleep." We didn't speak again until the morning.

When we finally crawled out of the sleeping bag in the morning, I couldn't remember having slept. I only remembered the images of me and Phoebe making love and the raging debate I had with myself about leaving Lincoln to follow the women's leadership of the Weather Underground Organization.

Part Three: Worldwide Family of Militant Women (1971-1975)

She Who
(1971-1972)

I opened a new journal in 1971 by scribbling a passage from Sylvia Plath's memoir, *The Bell Jar:* "One of the reasons I never wanted to get married...the last thing I wanted was infinite security and to be the place an arrow shoots off from. I wanted change and excitement and to shoot off in all directions myself."

Of course, Lincoln, my husband since 1966, encouraged me to take initiative. In fact, he invariably followed my leadership into Berkeley's political maelstrom. He shared my excitement when Bernardine Dohrn, the national leader of Students for a Democratic Society, invited me to join the National SDS Delegation to Cuba. He didn't complain when I spent the entire summer of 1968 there. Somehow, our marriage even survived the "smash monogamy" demands of our comrades in the Weather Underground. Even so by 1971, Plath's words leaped off the page at me.

By then, Lincoln and I shared an apartment in San Francisco with another *Movement* friend, Mark, a tall, good looking, blond photographer from West Texas who drove a motorcycle, studied karate in our dojo and dated multiple women. Our lives had always been filled with political commitments and debates. We rarely had a personal conversation. Gradually I realized that I needed refuge from the male bravura that filled our kitchen. I felt like an outsider in my own home.

I joined an all-women's study group that met every Tuesday night at Modern Times Bookstore to talk about women's literature. Debbie and her lover Adria, led the group. This tag team—Debbie, tall and pale with short, red, curly hair, a dancer, and Adria, also tall and pale, with short,

dark, straight hair, an athlete—fascinated and challenged me. As their hands lingered affectionately on each other's thighs, they argued that Doris Lessing was "male identified" and sabotaged the struggle for us to become "free women" by relying on male definitions and assumptions.

Their anti-Lessing judgment stung me. I had thoroughly identified with independent and assertive Anna, in *The Golden Notebook,* who gave voice to my anger at men, while still loving them. "No," I countered. "Just because she's a leftist, doesn't mean she accepts men's definition of women... I don't see your point."

My dismissal of their critique of Lessing might have shut most women up, but Debbie didn't back off. Rather she patiently explained, "Anna is a snob. She has no solidarity with other women. She's in that trap of all exceptional women, who think that because they're smart and educated, they can find some personal solution in a world dominated by men."

"Mmmmm." A loud bell rang and then vibrated through my memories. I had to admit, at least to myself, until then, in school, in political work, in my social life, I had often been the only woman in the room—an exceptional woman, and I was proud of it. If men didn't respect a woman, I had often thought, it was the woman's fault. My contempt for other women numbed my own hurt. When men ignored or disrespected me, I simply yelled louder. That study group gently forced me to one of many painful conclusions: women's oppression had turned me into a bitch.

By the end of the meeting, I tried to suppress a tangle of distressing thoughts about my bitchiness. During announcement time, I invited people to the next meeting of Women for the Seven Points—our women's group that didn't simply oppose the Viet Nam War but also supported revolutionary Vietnamese women's demands. Adria handed me a leaflet about a women's poetry reading. She watched me read it. "Arlene, why don't you come with us?"

I had noticed the same leaflet in the layers of leaflets on the Full Moon Coffeehouse bulletin board. Pat Parker and Judy Grahn were going to "read" their new women's poems at a church only a few blocks from where we lived. "OK, sure," I agreed.

When we arrived, the church's meeting room was packed. Not a man in sight. Nearly half of the women in the room were probably lesbians, a

SAN FRANCISCO, California, September 1971. Jane Norling's Madam Binh poster promoted the women's march against the Pentagon West. It was distributed by women's groups throughout the West Coast from Seattle to San Diego. (In the original, the predominant color was red)

handful were Black. I scanned the room looking for a seat. It was the first gathering I had been to in San Francisco where I recognized almost no one. Someone handed us folding chairs and made room in her row.

A Black woman, striding with confidence, headed for the front of the room. Pat Parker's Afro was short, leaving her broad, dark brown forehead and all-knowing smile on full display. She wore baggy jeans and a loose men's shirt hanging well below her waist. I looked in vain for her breasts. Her first poem proudly announced, "*I, woman, I /Can no longer claim/A mother of flesh/A father of marrow/I, woman must be/The child of myself.*"

Adria poked me to see if I shared her approval of the poem. "Yes," I thought. I too want to find the courage to recreate myself. Then, I found myself laughing until I almost peed as she recited a poem for her woman lover. She described in detail how when she tried to demonstrate her love with her tongue, at orgasm, her lover called out "oh Jesus." The poem ended, "here it is, some dude's getting credit for what a woman has done again."

"Yes." This time I agreed aloud. "Yes," bitterly remembering all the times when men seemed to ignore something I said. Then, ten minutes later, one of them would repeat my idea, as if it were his own, and everyone would nod. Even Lincoln often repeated my ideas as if they were his. Before the women in the audience finished chuckling at her poem for her lover, she grew serious. *"It is difficult to be/ Strong/And appear sure/ No one ever believes/ When you cry."*

I broke into the silence of the 100 women in the audience. "Oh." And quickly scribbled those words on the back of a wrinkled leaflet. I wondered how Lincoln would react if I told him that. He usually responded to me as if I were incapable of having hurt feelings.

The audience clapped and whistled, Pat bowed and ended by reminding us that her poems would soon be available in a pamphlet from Shameless Hussy Press. Before she sat down, other women stood up.

"A whore, a whore!" one yelled.

"A fishwife a cunt a harlot a harlot a pussy!" someone at the other end of the row scolded.

"A cunt a bitch/ a slut a slit/ a hole/ a whore/ a hole!" came from a third woman before I realized they were part of a chorus presenting Judy Grahn's "She Who" poems.

"A hole/a slut/ a cunt/ a slit/ a cut/ A slash/ a hole/ a slit/ a piece of shit/ a piece of shit/ a piece of shit..."

By the time they got to the final exorcism of abuse, I was sobbing—along with many of the other women in the room. Then, Judy intoned,

"She Who bears it
Bear down, breathe
Bear down, bear down, breathe...
The labor of She Who carries and bears
And raises and rears is the first labor,
There is no other first labor."

Wow, here was a poem by a lesbian, embodying universal women's solidarity, praising the labor of childbirth and again, inviting women to give birth to themselves.

I felt parts of myself come to life in each woman in Judy Grahn's collection of seven "Common Woman" poems.

"The common woman is as common as the common crow....

The common woman is as common as a rattlesnake....as a nail... as a thunderstorm... as the reddest wine..."

But it was Pat's last love poem that echoed in my head as I walked back home, hoping Lincoln would still be awake. He had often read poems to me, now I wanted to read him the words I had gotten permission from Pat Parker to copy from her notebook:

"Let me come to you naked
Come without my masks
Come dark
And lay beside you
Let me come to you old
Come as a dying snail
Come weak
And lay beside you

Let me come to you angry
Come shaking with hate
Come calloused
And lay beside you

Even more
Let me come to you strong
Come sure and free
Come powerful
And lay with you."

In those months before the poetry reading, I attempted to share my new feelings with Lincoln. He was my comrade. I usually conferred with him about all my political activities, teaching and writing. I wanted him to understand the things I was learning about myself and women's oppression. I needed to talk to him. "Hey Linc," I began, trying to tamp down my passion. "I've been thinking. You remember when Joe and I were co-editors of *The Movement?"*

Lincoln nodded and stiffened. Joe was still his friend, but, although I had worked 10, 12, 16 hours a day with Joe for two years, we no longer spoke.

"Whenever we traveled together on newspaper business, people always assumed he set editorial policy. Unless I had a byline, they also assumed he wrote all editorials. Then Joe accused me of being on an ego trip when I insisted on a byline. Just like a chauvinist. He took credit for my work and then put me down when I protested."

Lincoln shrugged. He heard my revelations as accusations but refused to openly disagree. That time, like most, he simply withdrew. "We're out of coffee, I better go get some," he answered. The more I challenged and ranted, the more he withdrew. Weeks went by when we didn't make love. My mother's advice taunted me, "Get a double bed. Never sleep in twins. No matter how bad you argue during the day, you can't stay angry with a man you share your bed with."

A lot she knew, I thought. Night after night, Lincoln and I had turned our backs to each other and tension chilled the empty space between us. Lincoln was my husband and marriage was for life. I never questioned my love for this man who taught me the words "male chauvinism." I took it for granted that we would find a way to cut through our

growing resentment, bridge the distance between us. Hadn't he named me "Bridgit" in the clandestine letters he sent from China? After all, if we had bridged the ocean between San Francisco and Peking for a year, we certainly could bridge the gap in our feelings about women's liberation.

At the same time, I expected him to do most of the emotional work. I told myself I wouldn't fall into the traditional trap of patriarchal marriage where women used all their energy to keep the relationship together. As our weeks of celibacy piled up, instead of pleading with him, a few days before the poetry reading, my pain erupted in a shower of anger, "You might as well sleep in the extra room. No sense waking each other when we go to bed at different times. No sense sharing this bed when we never make love." I had hoped he would protest. Instead, he mumbled, "if that's what you want." And shuffled out the room with his pillow.

We hadn't spoken since then. Now, I felt I had a way to make him understand me. I would read him Pat Parker's poem. I climbed the steep steps to our apartment quicker than usual and flung the front door open. "Hey Lincoln, Lincoln. I have a poem for you."

There was no response.

Finally, I gently opened the door to the extra room. At first, I wasn't sure he was there. Maybe he was out? But where? I fretted that it was just a matter of time before he found a woman who would make him feel good.

"What's going on?" his voice from under the covers was groggy, annoyed.

"Oh...nothing," I answered.

❧

"Avenge George Jackson." It was only a week after guards at San Quentin murdered him.

"Angela, Bernardine, Madame Binh,

Sisters in struggle gonna win."

I yelled with all my strength from the front of a march of 1,500 war-painted, mostlywhite women. We disrupted traffic on Lombard Street as we headed towards the Presidio Army Base which we had

SAN FRANCISCO, California, September 1971. Anti-imperialist women travelled from all over the West Coast to march against "Pentagon West".

WASHINGTON DC, May 1971. This front line of anti-imperialist women from East and West Coasts march against the Viet Nam War. We were some of the 12,000 people arrested during a week of militant actions. Arlene is 4th from right.

dubbed "Pentagon West." On Saturday, Labor Day weekend, 1971, as I held one end of a six-foot banner announcing "*Sisters fight for life, support the PRG Peace Proposal*," I gave little thought to the fact that I had hardly seen Lincoln that summer.

Instead, I had spent weeks with Sharon, an intensely committed, petite, but muscular woman—the only woman in our karate class who had been promoted to brown belt. Her intelligence matched her kata: graceful, precise, no-nonsense, disciplined and powerful. She and I drove from San Francisco to Eugene, Oregon and then south to San Diego. Along the way, we stayed in the homes of women interested in organizing a West Coast women's anti-imperialist movement. We were fed up with working in male-dominated anti-war organizations, but would not let our frustration with men weaken our commitment to ending the War. Our mission was to convince thousands of West Coast women to come to San Francisco for a week of women's cultural and political activities that would culminate in a march against the Presidio.

On the last night of that ambitious week of daily events, we celebrated. A few of us who initiated the first all-women-led anti-war actions on the West Coast went camping. Although totally exhausted, we were still speeding, fueled by the tension of the work and the effects of a cocaine-laced joint. We sat around the campfire, intending to celebrate our success. We had pulled off the first mass gathering that intertwined the new women's liberation movement with the anti-imperialist movement to end the war and racism. A couple of tokes of my first and last taste of cocaine, kept me awake for ten or fifteen minutes. Then I collapsed into a very sound sleep.

That fall I returned to my part-time job teaching in New College, an "alternative school" within San José State University. My work week began on Tuesday, when I made the hour drive down route 101 from San Francisco to San Jose. I arrived in time for my 11AM seminar, "Women, Madness and Revolution." From 12 to 15 women—the core of the yet-to-be-named Women's Studies Program—sat in a circle of huge pillows on the floor of what was once a bedroom in an old mansion on campus. Most of them were single and not yet 20. A couple of women were older,

re-entry students, who were married with kids. All were white except for Zelima, a brown-skinned Latina woman, who defied the feminist standard of the day by allowing her straight, never-cut, Black hair loose, to cascade past her the thighs of her tight jeans.

At the first meeting, I explained my plan for the seminar,

"When we reject our traditional roles as women, we have only two possibilities: we can go crazy or become revolutionaries. In this course, we will read the autobiographies of women to figure out how they paid the price for defying patriarchal tradition and survived."

As I passed out the draft syllabus, I proposed, "Let's introduce ourselves. How about each of us take a couple of minutes to explain how we have carried the weight of women's oppression and the price we have personally paid for rebelling. Who wants to start?"

No one responded.

I retreated from my plan to turn the seminar into a consciousness-raising group. I considered sharing my personal journey through madness—but lost confidence and decided to try a more "objective" approach. I read from a pamphlet I had found at one of Modern Times's workshops. I chose the lines that had helped me resist the impulse to plead with Lincoln when, weeks earlier, he had announced his decision to find his own place to live.

"...We are emotional service stations and when relationships fail, we feel guilt, self hatred...We have had... our emotional and mental feet bound for centuries. We must be smart enough to get a man, but not too smart to threaten him..."[11]

Some of the women in the circle nodded. So, I stopped reading. I asked for a show of hands, "How many of you have had trouble with your men because they felt threatened by you?"

"This is bullshit." Zelima interrupted. "All the classes in this school are heterosexist, homophobic crap. I don't know why the fuck I expected this one to be different."

"Damn," I thought to myself, "Of course, she's right. How do I have

11 Meredith Tax, *Woman and Her Mind: The Story of Daily Life* (New England Free Press, 1970).

the nerve to teach women's courses, when it's still so easy to slip into male-identified habits!" Zelima's perception and passion attracted me and, at the same time, I resented how she refused to give me the benefit of the doubt. The other women, who I thought had been on the verge of speaking, fell into an intimidated silence. I exhaled and made an attempt to return to the main point of the discussion without being defensive or ignoring Zelima's point. "Thanks, Zelima. It's important not to assume all women are in relationships with men. I didn't intend to imply that's the norm. My language just shows how much we've all been brainwashed. But the main point—that men are threatened by women who challenge them—applies even more to lesbians, don't you think? Isn't that why our sexist society comes down so hard on lesbians?"

"That should satisfy her," I thought, "and hopefully not alienate the rest of the class."

Thankfully, that day, Zelima nodded grudgingly and backed off. Meanwhile, I still needed to find a way to involve the other women—none of whom seemed ready to talk about their personal experiences with sexism. So I returned to quoting Meredith Tax.

"It's impossible to achieve some sort of revolutionary consciousness without painful confrontation with the self....We are damaged goods. Things that mess us up are inherent in society....We need a social movement, a revolution, if we are ever to recover ourselves."

Then I suggested:

"Understanding how our personal problems are not our fault, not ours alone, can be painful. It's painful and hard to talk about aloud. So, how about each of you take the next 10 minutes to write a few sentences about a time you felt like you might be going crazy or just couldn't see a way out of a problem that had its roots in women's oppression. When you're finished writing, it's your choice whether you want to share what you've written with the rest of us."

After a minute of paper shuffling, sighing and pencil biting, everyone, including me, began to write. I scribbled quickly, then checked my watch. Fifteen minutes had passed. "Are you finished?" I asked to a circle of heads bowed over their notebooks. They started writing faster. "Ok, we'll take another couple of minutes."

Zelima continued writing while one by one the others placed their notebooks on the floor in front of their pillows. "Anyone want to read?" I asked hopefully. We still had an hour left before the seminar ended. What would I do with the remaining time if no one volunteered to read? I could read my piece, but I had already monopolized too much of the discussion. A young, pale woman with a timid smile, tentatively raised her hand. "Good, please go ahead," I nodded to her.

"I am no one's wife or girlfriend. But I am my mother's daughter. I watched her smoke in her kitchen, cigarette after cigarette, the skin on her smoker's fingers turning from flesh to burnt leather. I do not want to become my mother." She cleared her throat, fighting tears. "There's more, but that's all I want to read now." The student sitting next to her patted her on the shoulder. By the time we had to vacate the room, five women had read, mostly about their mothers. The ice was broken.

That discussion triggered an image of a typical scene in my knotty relationship with my mother. I hadn't visited her since sometime in the fall of 1969, not long after a Palestinian commando unit, led by a woman, hijacked TWA Flight 840 and forced Israel to release some Palestinian political prisoners in exchange for the captive plane passengers. Within weeks, when her identity was known, Leila Khaled, the leader of the Che Guevara Commando Unit of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, became an international hero among those of us who sided with national liberation struggles, especially against Zionism. My mother was an ardent Zionist. Partly in a futile effort to bridge the abyss between us and partly to taunt her, I screamed, "Leila Khaled is my idol. What would you do if you heard I had been arrested for hijacking a plane to free Palestine!"

My mother, Sylvia Eisen, narrowed her eyes, lowered her voice, and snarled, "I'd bail you out and beat you to death myself!"

During that semester at San José State, I led two women's courses that met on Tuesday. Then I stayed overnight in San José at a collective house of radical faculty and grad students and taught a seminar on racism and another on creative writing the following day. Finally, early Wednesday evening I drove north again to my life in San Francisco, too exhausted to brood about Lincoln for at least a couple of days. Yet, for a year and a half

after he moved to his own apartment, we occasionally went to a movie, had dinner, even made love. I harbored the hope that somehow—without me compromising my new-found women's dignity, we would work on a way to heal our marriage.

Sometime during the spring of 1973, one of my students, Sara, who was part of the San José State Steering Committee to plan a teach-in against the War, approached me in the New College hallway, "Arlene, you know the teach-in is scheduled for next week. I got all the sessions set up except one."

"Good." I responded without much interest. In Berkeley and San Francisco, we thought teach-ins were already passé. "Which one are you missing?"

"We've been thinking we need a session on Vietnamese women. We want you to lead it."

"Me, why me? I don't know anything about Vietnamese women."

"You're the most logical person to do it. You're our Women's Studies faculty member and you're against the war. You'll figure out what to do. You have to. The session will be 50 minutes. You can talk for 15 or 20 and leave the rest of the time for questions. A piece of cake."

"But I don't have time to put something totally new together this particular weekend. You should have given me more notice." I calculated that I would have to cancel an all-day meeting of a planning committee for the embryonic San Francisco Women's Union and also postpone a date with Lincoln if I were to have enough time to prepare for the teach-in.

Sara lost her patience. "Sorry, too bad. You gotta do it. There's no one else. You're the one who's always talking about how women's struggles against oppression in the United States are connected to the Vietnamese people's struggles against imperialism."

I gave up my resistance and spent a frantic weekend of research. I had a small out-of-print volume called *Vietnamese Studies #10—Women*, which had been published in Hanoi. I spent a day taking detailed notes on that dusty book and sorting through a pile of miscellaneous clippings I had been collecting. Totally engrossed in the stories about Vietnamese

women's heroism, I found more than enough material for a twenty-minute talk.

Then, a couple of days before the teach-in, Vince, a Viet Nam vet, came to my office. Vince was a tall, muscular white man, who had convinced me to sign the papers for an independent studies contract. He had the charm of a recovering heroin addict, who wanted to use the course to reflect on his tour of duty in Viet Nam. Even before the label "post traumatic stress disorder" became common, Vince had committed to studying and healing himself. I always felt drained after meeting with him—torn between wanting to support a fellow anti-war activist and withholding forgiveness for the war crimes he had confessed to me in gory detail.

Now he was standing at the threshold of my open office door. "Arlene, are you busy?"

"Vince, I thought our appointment wasn't until tomorrow."

"Yeah, but I have something I need to talk about now."

I glanced at my watch. Grudgingly: "I only have a few minutes now. Gotta prepare for my seminar. What's happening?"

"I had a dream last night—a new dream."

"Yes? Do we have to talk about it now?"

"Please. This image of a woman—her legs spread apart—keeps appearing in my fucked up head. There's an M16 pointing out of her cunt. The same rifle she was raped with and now she's aiming it at me."

"Oh Vince. Oh my God. I'm really sorry. I don't know what to say." I reached out to hug him, but stopped myself. "I don't want to cut you off, but you know the teacher can't be late for class. Can you come back in three hours?"

Vince nodded. "Sure, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to lay such a heavy trip on you. Later."

He didn't come back in three hours but did come for our appointment the next day. The horror of Vince's memories of GI's raping Vietnamese women became the core of my talk at the teach-in: "Rape as Pentagon Policy." Anti-imperialists had to embrace women's liberation.

Those for women's liberation had to commit to anti-imperialism. Word of the teach-in session spread quickly. Sara arranged to add an additional session and in the following weeks I repeated and expanded the talk for audiences on other campuses.

❧

After Lincoln and Mark moved out of our large Victorian house on 25th Street, I invited three women I met on bulletin boards, "seeking feminist room-mates," to move in. A law student took over the largest bedroom—the one where Lincoln and I had slept for several years. To me, the walls of that room echoed desertion. Hoping to free myself from feeling abandoned, I converted the house's enclosed back porch into my new bedroom.

I loved my new room where ivy, blackberry shrubs and mint grew wildly on the other side of three floor-to-ceiling glass walls. Those plants greeted me each morning—almost making me forget that I had spent another night alone in my double bed. I plastered the one remaining side with a wallpaper of posters and photos of Vietnamese women, Angolan women, Nguyen Thi Dinh, Tania, Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, Meridel LeSeuer and snippets of women's poems. Ho Chi Minh with his wispy long gray beard and kind eyes, an abstract portrait of Che Guevara, another of George Jackson and a poster crying "Avenge Attica" were the only men on my wall of inspiration or anywhere in my home.

My favorite image was a photograph of a typically short Vietnamese peasant woman holding a bayonet to the back of a hulking US bomber pilot. Her anti-aircraft unit had just shot down his plane in Hà Tĩnh. Even with his head bowed, the top of her head came only slightly above his waist. I marveled at how the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam had issued a postage stamp featuring her image to commemorate the 2000th US plane shot down over Viet Nam.

I read everything I could get my hands on about women who risked prison, torture, and death to free their country. Nguyen Thi Dinh, an illiterate peasant woman, until she joined the guerrilla army, inspired me most. She eventually became a General and Deputy Commander-in-Chief of the People's Liberation Army.

An old Smith Corona manual typewriter sat on my desk, waiting

for me to type out a proposal for a pamphlet about Vietnamese women. Once the school semester was over, each morning, I opened the glass door across from my bed, and without having to dress or climb even one step, I waded into the blackberry patch to pick enough berries to flavor a breakfast bowl of yogurt. On those days when I had no meeting scheduled and no one called to invite me to a movie, I stayed in my nightgown all day, reading, typing the pamphlet on Vietnamese women and watching the Watergate hearings on TV. The way Nixon's cronies each took their turn snitching fascinated me. "Rats leaving a sinking ship," I chuckled, hoping the scandal would critically damage the imperial state. On a Monday in mid-July, one of Nixon's aides shocked the country by revealing to the Watergate Committee that Nixon had recorded all his conversations in the White House. That day, Lincoln's call interrupted my morning routine.

"Lincoln?" I tried to keep my tone even as I answered the phone. "Sure you can come over." I responded to his request forgetting that I had promised myself to end my "open door policy" as long as he refused to stop seeing his new lover. "Yes, around noon is fine." I calculated that I could use the time before noon to shower, dress, make my bed and arrange my desk so that Lincoln would immediately notice my productivity: copies of the outline of my Vietnamese women pamphlet, proposals for the San Francisco Women's Union and a presentation on an anti-war resolution to be passed at the First Women's Studies Conference.

The hot shower barely eased the tension roiling in my stomach. What should I wear? I had gained weight and realized I dreaded Lincoln seeing me in my jeans and usual oversized t-shirt that covered the fly I could no longer zip. After the shower, I wrapped myself in a huge towel and, instead of getting dressed right away, I decided to pick some berries first. As I bent over, the towel loosened and dropped to my ankles. The Mission District sun had already burned off the morning fog. As I stood, I felt beautiful and loved by the warmth of the sun on my shoulders, nipples and stomach. A high fence totally blocked neighbors' views of me in our small garden. From the other side of the fence, I heard neighbors' voices. Knowing they were only a few feet away, yet oblivious to my nakedness, added to my excitement. Momentarily I hoped Lincoln would arrive early, find me naked and irresistible in the backyard. Then, just as

quickly, I dressed, only a couple of minutes before he arrived. From the front door's threshold, he glanced at my bare feet and gave me a brotherly peck on the cheek. I stepped away. "Morning, Lincoln, how are you?" I hoped I sounded apathetic—like I really didn't give a shit how he was.

"Good, very good." He smiled and followed me into the kitchen, without even glancing to his right as he passed our old bedroom.

"Have you been watching the hearings?" I asked, trying to take the initiative in a political conversation that I hoped would be emotionally safe. He too had enjoyed watching Nixon's henchmen squirm. During the time of our separation, I hadn't given much thought to how much I enjoyed political discussions with him. My thoughts had been abstract, obsessive musings about his sexism, his abandoning me.

"Hey, Arlene, I didn't see the TV in the living room when I came in. How do you watch the hearings?"

"Oh, I guess you haven't been here since I rearranged the house." I studied nonchalance. "I converted the back room into my bedroom. I have the TV in there." I pointed to the door behind the kitchen table that separated the kitchen from the back room. I wanted him to see my new room, which I thought represented my wonderful new life without him. "C'mon, I'll show you." I took his hand and led him five steps into my bedroom. Besides the one desk chair, my bed was the only place to sit. I sat as he studied the posters and photos on the wall near the desk. He admired a prized poster—a silkscreen in vivid purples of a Vietnamese woman guerrilla by René Mederos, the famous Cuban poster artist.

"I like it. You really fixed up this place nicely. Not one inch of that dirty old wallpaper shows," he observed, as he sat down next to me on the bed as if he had never left. The noon sun had made the room very hot. As I reached over the bed to open the door to the garden, he gently took my arm, kissed it, and pulled me towards him. I had no resistance to give. In spite of myself, I had counted those weeks of celibacy as they stretched into months. Now that he was finally next to me, my hopes soared. I thought, "That's why he wanted to see me. At last he had grown bored with his new lover and wants to rebuild our marriage." Our lovemaking felt like a warm reunion. Afterwards, he whispered.

"Arlene, I have something to tell you,"

"Yes?" I asked nonchalantly, without the defensive tone I had adopted with him ever since he had moved out. We were still lying next to each other, naked.

"I got an invitation to spend a year in Cuba—working for Radio Havana Cuba."

"Oh Lincoln, that's fantastic. You'll finally be able to put your radio skills to good use." I sat up in bed. My mind raced. Ever since my first visit to Cuba in 1968, I had wanted to return. I could go with him, work for *Tricontinental Magazine* or teach at the University of Havana.

He nodded soberly and propped himself on one elbow. "Yes, it's good news, but you're not gonna like the next part."

"What?" I couldn't imagine what I wouldn't like about Cuba or us going there together.

"I've decided to take G with me." He said in a rush, sat up and reached for his shorts.

I caught the words, but I was certain I had heard wrong. "What did you say?"

He repeated more slowly, in a whisper, bracing himself for my response. "I've decided to take G with me to Cuba."

Without thinking, I yelled, "But why her? She's not a journalist. I am. What can she do there? Take me! I could be a lot more useful."

He shook his head. By now he was almost fully dressed. "Arlene, I'm sorry I didn't tell you sooner. G and I have been living together. We're in love and do not want to be separated for a year. I'm sorry."

I stood, picked up the towel, wrapped it around my naked body and sank to the bed. Finally, I understood. After nearly two years of telling me he couldn't decide, Lincoln had finally decided. Our marriage was definitively over. I swallowed hard, struggled against a rising impulse to vomit and rose to my feet again. "Sure, you're sorry." Then, without planning to, I smacked him hard enough to make him fall back onto the bed. "Get the fuck out of here. Fuck you. Fuck G. Stay away from me. I will not speak to you again."

"But, Arlene…" I picked up a sandal and hurled it at him. He ducked. I grazed his shoulder.

"No buts—fuck your lies. Get the fuck outta here."

That weekend, as our women's group backpacked through the Pinnacles, sadness engulfed me. I barely noticed the wild beauty of the rock formations. I could not talk—except to rant about how Lincoln had betrayed me. I couldn't sleep. My fellow backpackers soon lost patience with me. After lunch, Lori, usually the most diplomatic of the group, interrupted me. "Forget it. You broke up years ago. This should be old news. You're better off without him."

"Yes. It's true. But I still had hope..."

"There is hope. But not for you with him. It's over. We're sick of your obsession with Lincoln. You gotta stop talking about him—please!"

I sulked for the rest of the weekend. When they finally dropped me off at 25th Street, I threw my backpack on the floor of the living room and made a beeline for my desk. There I splattered my misery all over pages and pages of my journal. Then I scrawled "ENOUGH. This is what's important:" The pamphlet on Vietnamese women was at the top of the list.

Ever since I had spoken about Vietnamese women at the teach-in, I had been invited to give the talk a few times a month in other places. Before each new talk, I gathered more information, and revised the outline to answer the previous session's questions. But there was always one question I couldn't answer: "where can we read more about this?" I vowed to finish the pamphlet in record time.

The next day, without breaking to eat, read the newspaper or watch the Watergate hearings, I read the entire text of the *Winter Soldier Investigation,* a book by the Viet Nam Veterans Against the War that documented atrocities they had committed in Viet Nam. Sobbing intermittently, I took detailed notes on their accounts that attempted to atone for raping and torturing thousands of Vietnamese women. Then I reviewed my notes on the conversations I had had with my student Vince, the Viet Nam vet. That night I slept fitfully—dreaming sharded images of US troops lunging with their bayonets into the women they raped. At about 3AM, I gave up trying to sleep and re-read an article that had become a classic in feminist circles, *The Politics of Rape*, by Susan Griffin. Before dozing off again, I scribbled these notes:

Patriarchy leads to Rape./Imperialism leads to the Viet Nam War./Patriarchy and Imperialism feed each other and lead to the rape of Vietnamese women./Rape serves as a multi-purpose policy of the US War Machine./Effects on Vietnamese and US societies when GIs come home.(USE EXAMPLES)

I couldn't wait to sit down at the typewriter. I typed furiously from dawn until the sun was gone. Finally, I pulled page nineteen from the typewriter, exhausted, but satisfied. I was eager to read it to some of the other women from People's Press who agreed to publish the pamphlet. I had completed a rough draft of *The Politics of Rape in Viet Nam*—which was to become chapter four of my yet-to-be-written book.

"All Wounds Return as Warriors" -Meridel LeSueur (1973-1974)

I grieved the death of my marriage, and plugged away at creating and taking pride in my new life as an independent woman. "You have a family here. You don't consider me a sister if you can't tell me your pain." I had barely recognized Meridel's voice on the phone. She rarely called me.

Meridel was seventy-three years old. It was easy to keep track of her age. She was as old as the century. When she was 15, her mother had sent her to study with Emma Goldman. Meridel became a well-known feminist communist writer and poet. Lincoln's uncle had married one of her daughters. She was a family icon and my adopted mother. Although two generations separated her birthday and mine, we both obeyed a rigid unwritten rule against relying on the phone for anything but the most superficial communication. Ever since her mother's dying in the early 1950s, when the FBI staked out her hospital bed, Meridel assumed her phone was tapped. Likewise since the summer of 1968, various echoes, buzzes and breaths on my phone lines, stakeouts around my home and FBI interviews of my parents and friends, left no doubt that defense against their surveillance had to be a permanent posture. Besides, long distance phone calls between San Francisco and St. Paul were expensive.

"Meridel?"

"Of course." Her tone was uncharacteristically impatient. "Arlene, is that you?"

"Yes"

"Don't be puritan or bourgeois about your emotions. Let them come out. Don't even try to keep them under control." She was breaking the phone rule. I knew why. My last letter to her was filled with questions that led to one self-pitying conclusion. "What's wrong with me?" Then I apologized to her for unloading my depression on her. She would have none of it. "I answered your letter, but your melancholy alarmed me, so I thought I'd call too."

Meridel's letter arrived a few days later.

"Your work must always be the most important thing in your life. Otherwise, you're sunk. You can waste your life feeding the male ego. I saw Lincoln with his new sweetheart. His male ego just basks in her adoration... But you belong with the daughters of Bedlam .... the new seraphic women, those being born, and not yet born—all the women of the dark earth rising into light and freedom."

I could not imagine trusting a man again.

As soon as the rainy season ended in 1973, our new, tiny group, Women Arise, designed a portable exhibit featuring photos of women working and fighting in Viet Nam and in the US. We hauled the interlocking panels to rallies and parks, aiming to educate women, to promote and popularize an anti-imperialist women's point of view. Sometime in May, on a warm Saturday afternoon, on the fringes of an anti-war rally in the Panhandle of Golden Gate Park, I sat behind a card table covered with leaflets and pamphlets next to the exhibit. I paid little attention to the speeches about how Nixon continued to bomb Viet Nam, despite the recently signed Paris Peace Agreements. They were saying nothing I didn't already know. I passed the time leafing through the latest issue of *Women: A Journal of Liberation.*

Two or three white women circled the exhibit quickly. One grabbed a leaflet from the table and rushed off without making eye contact. Then another white woman lingered in front of the panel that featured the iconic Vietnamese militia woman with a bayonet in the back of a hulking, downed US bomber pilot. I saw her leave the panel, circle the four-sided exhibit and return again to the Hà Tĩnh woman's image. This time, in small jerking movements, she poked around her purse and finally pulled

out a pad and pen. She copied something off the picture caption and was about to leave when I left the table and approached her.

"She's my favorite too." I remarked. "She's inspiring, don't you think?"

Her nod and smile encouraged me.

"I think the women's movement here can learn a lot from Vietnamese women." I tried to sound like this was the first time the thought had occurred to me.

"Well, I dunno about that." Her accent and tone reminded me of my own New Yorker's cynicism that I thought I had abandoned years earlier. Obviously braless, she wore a tank top tucked into the beltline of her tight jeans. I don't know why, but her exaggerated hour-glass shape shocked me. Her large wire-rimmed glasses, her huge leather shoulder bag overflowing with papers and books—everything about her screamed "intellectual"—except for her smile. Hers was a shy, humble smile. When I spoke, she stared into my eyes as if I were the first woman she had ever listened to.

I didn't ask her where she stood in the long line of views on women's liberation. Did she believe that avoiding marriage or motherhood was the route to liberation? Or did she understand that women's liberation required a total revolution? Rather, I plunged into riskier waters.

"It pisses me off, how most feminists in the US believe they invented women's liberation. It's racist and arrogant for women here—especially white women—to insist that smashing the nuclear family is the way to get rid of patriarchy. And, to boot, they say that anyone who doesn't agree is hopelessly male-identified."

She squinted and tilted her head without answering. Yet, she didn't seem intimidated or ready to leave. We ended up talking that afternoon, sharing our histories, until the fog rolled in and most people left the Park. As I had guessed, Diana had recently arrived in San Francisco from New York. She had never been active in the anti-war movement, and was working to organize San Francisco Women Against Rape. She wasn't sure, but thought she might be a lesbian. I invited her to our next Women Arise meeting. She became one of our most committed members.

Meanwhile, People's Press had signed on to my proposal to publish a pamphlet about Vietnamese women. Eventually, five women agreed to work in an editorial collective to produce the pamphlet. Penny Johnson, a staff member of Peoples Press, had been a graduate student in English. With wisdom, patience and humor, she honed in on every conceivable form of messy grammar and muddy writing I produced. Whatever I know about sentence construction, I learned from Penny. Jane Norling, a passionate, talented painter and graphic artist, created the book design and a series of illustrations that continued to be reproduced decades later. Susan Adelman, Peggy Tucker, one of my room-mates, and finally, Diana Block joined our publishing collective.

Twice a week for several months, six of us squeezed around my kitchen table to talk and debate the week's chapter—line by line. I began, "Page one, Chapter One—this chapter is about women's oppression under feudalism: Marriage, particularly polygamy, was an institution designed to exploit women's labor."

Peggy interjected before I could continue. "You gotta explain what polygamy is. A lot of people don't know."

I began to object, but Diana cut me off. "I agree. You also need to explain the word 'exploit.' After all, if we want people who aren't already in the movement to read this and change their minds, we can't assume they already understand economics."

I doodled and fidgeted, struggling to restrain my growing frustration. At this rate, it would take years to finish the pamphlet, I grumbled to myself. Meanwhile Penny made a suggestion that convinced me. "You don't need to give an academic definition for every term you use. You can clarify their meaning by giving concrete examples. Then people will draw their own conclusions. Besides, it won't be so boring."

"OK," I conceded in a grunt. But weeks went by when I contested every editorial suggestion. "I don't see what you mean here on this page," one of them would begin.

"That's because you're an idiot," I thought to myself. Too many sessions ended without reaching consensus. Tension built. I wasn't the only one on the verge of quitting. Then, before the next meeting, Diana often sought me out. "Let's talk."

Sitting on the mattress on her floor, after hours of talking, with my back aching, Diana, super intelligent, persistent Diana, who still stared intently into my eyes whenever I spoke, finally got through to me. I realized that during our editorial meetings, although I might object to a specific suggestion, I had to admit that the implied criticism invariably indicated that some sort of revision was needed. I felt ashamed. Here were five busy women, as dedicated to bringing the story of Vietnamese women to the US as I was, spending hours and hours of their time and I took them for granted. I knew I had been a defensive asshole, but could not bring myself to apologize to Diana and certainly not to the rest of the group. I felt a deeper respect for those women and enormous gratitude for their persistence—and cursed the emotional shield that was so hard for me to drop.

During the next editorial meeting I hardly said anything. I took pages of notes, convinced that each remark must be precious. This pamphlet would not only serve the anti-imperialist struggle, it would also honor this group of women. In the course of these meetings, the manuscript for the pamphlet grew from 48 to 96 pages. Each time they asked for more examples, clarifications, I did more research. I found wonderful collections of women's folktales that made the chapter on women's anti-feudal resistance come alive and personal accounts of Vietnamese women who had organized marches that all of us identified with. After combing through the third draft, weary from rewriting and rereading, everyone seemed satisfied. Shocked, we realized our pamphlet had grown to a book, 224 pages long!

During the first couple months of the editorial work, Diana and I spent more and more time together. I thoroughly enjoyed our conversations where she seemed to want to devour all that I knew about imperialism, Cuba, Viet Nam and national liberation struggles. And, she challenged me to explore the ways imperialism related to rape, the nuclear family and homophobia. I increasingly looked forward to conversations—depended on them, in fact.

One night, after we had finished dissecting our latest editorial meeting, she asked me, "What do you think of lesbianism?" We were sitting next to each other on her bed, as usual.

"It's one way to challenge patriarchy," I might have been taking a multiple-choice exam.

"No," her voice lowered to a near whisper. "I mean what do you think of lesbianism for yourself? Have you ever thought about having a woman lover?"

She had spent many hours listening to my complaints about Lincoln. But I hadn't told her about my attraction to Pat Parker or Zelima, which I had hardly recognized myself. Nor had I ever mentioned my short-lived attempts at "making love with women comrades" in the early days of Weather organizing. After the conference in Flint, "smashing monogamy and heterosexism" in practice was a requirement of collective membership.

"Sure," I answered Diana much too quickly. "I have no problem with being lovers with a woman. It just hasn't really worked out yet."

"Do you know why not?" she pressed.

I thought about Phoebe, and Bernardine at Flint and about sharing a bed with Nance, Gail—all straight women I had been drawn to. Slowly I shook my head, "No, not really."

She paused, studied her thumb and bit into her cuticle. We both had the nervous habit of cannibalizing the skin on our thumbs. "Well, Arlene, I need to tell you something. I'm attracted to you." She paused and lightly touched my thigh, but only for an instant. I felt I needed to fill the silence. I wished I felt some urge, some impulse to reach for her—to tell her I felt the same way. But I didn't. I couldn't. I felt nothing—at least no sexual or romantic spark, nothing I recognized as passion. Yet I was conscious of my deep appreciation for her intellectual stimulation, friendship and political support. I was also too curious to say no.

"Why not?" I thought. By then, I had banished men from virtually all parts of my life, even from my fantasies. Swept along by the woman-loving flood I had immersed myself in, I accepted her proposal that we become lovers. Sadly, my acceptance was always cerebral, never visceral. I was willing to accept a share of blame for our mutually frustrating relationship. I thought that the problem must have been my own internalized homophobia which prevented a full out lesbian commitment. Yet

later, a passionate relationship with another woman made me understand that Diana and I just didn't click as lovers.

She realized this and, more than once, stopped seeing me in order to protect herself. To me it seemed that she held our friendship and working relationship hostage. Either we were lovers and would work together or we had to separate and she would withdraw her friendship and labor. We became an incredibly productive team. Yet until l I left the Bay Area in the summer of 1975, I alternatively felt either guilty for using her or betrayed on those few occasions when she declared she couldn't stay with me if I didn't meet her terms. Although we never agreed to monogamy, I probably hurt her more by my incapacity to muster more than passive acceptance of sex with her than with my infidelities.

Finding the Truong Son Road (1974)

In the early spring of 1973, shortly after I began combing through files for stories about Vietnamese women, I went to a meeting at the Mime Troupe's indoor performance space. Across the cavernous, but packed, room, I spotted Tom Hayden, the past president of Students for a Democratic Society. It had probably been five years since we last spoke—when he was a community organizer in New Jersey and one of the people we depended on to distribute *The Movement* newspaper. Since then, we had moved towards different ends of the anti-war political spectrum. He had a reputation for making deals with liberal Democrats and eventually ran for office

As I made my way through the crowd towards him, I argued with myself: "So what if the media has made him a 'radical' super star. So what if he does all the talking in any group he's in. He's been to Viet Nam and he might have some information I can use." When I was close enough for him to hear me, I yelled, "Hey Tom. I need to ask you an important question about Viet Nam. Can you talk now?" No introductory pleasantries. I was all business and he was too.

"Sure, Arlene. What's up?"

"Ever since I was invited to give a talk about Vietnamese women, I've been collecting information. You know, the women's movement here has really grown. People are hungry for information about women over there."

Tom glanced at his watch. I explained to him how lots of women who came to my talks hadn't been involved in the anti-war movement.

But after our discussions, most understand that the same war machine that grinds up women in the US also swallows women in Viet Nam. So, to spread the word, I'd decided to write a pamphlet about Vietnamese women. I concluded, "Do you have any suggestions about how I can get more information?" His smile unnerved me—like a chess player calculating his final triumphant move, without a pause. "As a matter of fact, I do. Jane Fonda got back from Viet Nam with piles of tapes she recorded with Vietnamese women."

"Fine," I thought, "that's no help." I had seen Fonda's anti-war movie *Fuck the Army* and had heard that she went to Viet Nam. Yet to me, she was still a movie star who might as well have been living on another planet. In any case, I said to him, "Have you heard the tapes?"

"I haven't had time but Jane says they're powerful. She wants to put them to good use."

I didn't show my surprise at how casually he referred to a personal conversation with that superstar actress. I still didn't understand what this had to do with me. Then I had a bold idea: "Tom, would you be able to arrange for me to hear the tapes?"

"Why don't you do it yourself!" he was losing patience.

"But I don't know Jane Fonda. I don't even know how to reach her."

"Look, Arlene. If you want to write her a note, I can get it to her." Tom broke eye contact. "I need to speak to someone over there. I'll be here another few minutes. If you want me to deliver the note, write it now." He moved towards a man I didn't recognize who was standing maybe ten feet away.

I nodded and frantically rummaged in my purse for a piece of paper and pen. I had no clean paper, so I ripped a sheet from my appointment book. With one eye on Tom and the other on the paper, I scribbled a note. "Dear Jane. Tom tells me you have tapes of interviews with Vietnamese women. I am part of an anti-imperialist women's project." I paused, weighing whether I should use the term "anti-imperialist." Would it turn her off? Would she dismiss me as a crazed radical? Perhaps, but I decided that I needed her to respect me for who I was. And if I expected her to respect me, I needed to respect her intelligence. I continued:

"We have been giving talks about Vietnamese women to a lot of women's groups. The talks are in demand, but we can reach a lot more women if we have a pamphlet to go with the talks. Tom tells me you have tapes that might be useful in finishing the pamphlet. Here's my address and phone number...I hope to hear from you soon."

I weighed whether to sign it with my usual drawing of a National Liberation Front flag inside a woman's symbol. Instead, I just scrawled my name.

Tom was almost at the door when I handed him the folded paper. "Thanks."

"No problem." He mumbled without looking at me as he stuffed it in his pocket and hurried out the door.

I told myself, "That's that. Well, at least I tried." A few days later, I mentioned to Nancy, one of my only friends who had ever been close friends with Tom, that I had run into him. "Do you think he'll follow up on his offer to put me in touch with Jane Fonda?"

"Mmmmmm. Oh, I guess the rumor is real, then," Nancy mused.

"What rumor?"

"I heard that Tom and Fonda are lovers, engaged to be married."

"Damn. He didn't mention that."

"No, he wouldn't. But now I think it's true."

Some weeks later I was in the backyard pouring over a badly translated article when the phone rang. My roommate Peggy picked it up. "It's for you, Arlene," she yelled.

As I ambled into the kitchen, I whispered to Peggy, "Who is it? I don't really have time."

Peggy shrugged, "I didn't ask who it was. You're always reminding us not to ask. But her voice sounds familiar."

I grabbed the phone. "Hello?" I asked, waiting to hear who was interrupting my work.

"Hello, is this Arlene Eisen?" a familiar voice asked in clipped syllables.

"Yes? Who's this?"

"Hi, Arlene. This is Jane."

Oh my god, I thought.

"Jane Fonda." She added unnecessarily. "Tom gave me your number. He says you're doing some important work about Vietnamese women. I'd like to hear more about it. Is this a good time to talk?"

A month or so later, with an overnight bag full of notes and a change of underwear, I flew to Jane and Tom's home in Santa Monica. The house sat on the street in a row of other modest houses, a short walk from the beach. Nothing like those Hollywood mansions pictured in traditional teen and "ladies" magazines. When I arrived, Jane met me at the door. There was no butler, no maid. She was home alone. She led me into a sunny kitchen, filled with plants and a newly sanded oak table. It was lunch time. A white push-button phone, a model I had never seen before, sat on the counter. She ignored its ringing. "If it's important, they'll call back." Her nod and gaze at me seemed designed to say, "you have my full attention, all my attention."

"For sure." I tried to sound casual but in my head, I repeated a mantra: "she's just a woman like any other woman." Then I remembered her as Barbarella, the iconic sex object in CinemaScope, plastered across that huge movie screen. "No, she's not just like any woman, she's been objectified and humiliated in front of millions. She's the one who needs support."

"I hope you like yogurt." She waved in the direction of an oversized refrigerator. "Help yourself. I'm not hungry. I'll just make us some tea."

I opened the refrigerator. The maximum number of cubic feet of white space glared back at me. The refrigerator was totally bare except for a dozen or so eight-ounce containers of yogurt in various fruit flavors. Jane was five or six months pregnant—too pregnant to work on a movie set, but not too pregnant to spend hours on the phone persuading her fellow actors to contribute money to the anti-war movement and to the Black Panther Party Legal Defense Fund. In between phone calls, she regaled me with stories about her childhood, her time in Paris among

leftist intellectuals and artists, her budding feminism and her time in Viet Nam. We spent hours sorting through her tapes, photos and slides, as she lovingly pointed out the women who had impressed her. One was an older woman with a white head bandana, Vo Thi Thê.

"Is she the same Vo Thi Thê who met with that group of feminists in Vancouver?" I asked Jane. I had read about that meeting where everyone at the meeting reported that they fell in love with her.

"Yes, she must be." Jane answered. "She's the one on the Central Committee of the Viet Nam Women's Union responsible for relations with the United States. She was very interested in the women's movement here. I regretted that I couldn't tell her more. I have had relatively little personal experience with women's organizations in the States."

I explained how our women's group aimed to connect our own experience with rape and violence with Vietnamese women's experience—that patriarchy is a cornerstone of imperialism and we can't get rid of patriarchy as long as imperialists rule. "We show women here that Vietnamese women's victories are our victories. That we have a common enemy."

"Of course, that's true." She responded. I would have been lying to myself if I claimed that I didn't bask in her approval. And she added, "Arlene, I think you must do more than an article or pamphlet. With all the material here," she waved to the piles of tapes and slides on the kitchen table, "combined with your analysis, you should do a book."

Dazed, I returned to San Francisco after three days with a second suitcase full of her slides, tapes, notes and a new confidence in our project about Vietnamese women. She also encouraged me to write to the Women's Union in Hanoi if I needed more information. I returned to San Francisco ecstatic and with a fierce energy, threw myself into the work.

❧

After a few weeks of work listening to Jane's tapes and cataloging all the information I had, I discovered there were still some gaping holes. I typed up a list of questions—especially searching for details on how the Women's Union built their power to struggle against patriarchy. I sent the list to the Viet Nam Women's Union along with an explanation of how I intended to use the information. Several months later, a thin enve-

lope arrived, postmarked Hanoi. It contained three single-spaced, typed, onion-skin pages with answers to my list of questions. Then, after the last answer, at the bottom of the third page, it said,

"We very much appreciate your project. You clearly have worked hard to understand the struggle of Vietnamese women. And you have done a good job, considering the limitations. But we do not believe you can fully understand us without visiting us. We hope you will accept this invitation to visit our country as our guest."

The letter was signed by the president of the Viet Nam Women's Union. I was ecstatic. I called a special meeting of our editorial group to share the news. Everyone talked at once. Our project had just received the highest possible honor and encouragement. In those days, with the war still raging, a trip to the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam required a lot more than a passport and plane ticket. The US government banned its citizens from traveling there and the Vietnamese allowed only invited friends to visit. The Vietnamese carefully protected their guests, so bombing raids often forced them to postpone visits. My own trip had been planned for almost a year before I received a call from Jane in May 1974. I heard the excitement in her voice, "You're definitely going. You're definitely going!"

"When?"

"Soon. You should begin making travel arrangements now."

After months of uncertainty, our publishing collective had decided to proceed with work on the book regardless of my travel plans. We had finally begun work at the light tables, laying out the galleys. At our next meeting, I reported on the news from Jane. "What should we do? We could suspend work until I return from Viet Nam when I'm sure we'll have a lot more material."

"Arlene, for months you've been talking about how we have to push to get the thing done, how urgent it is to mobilize women against the war. Now you want to slow it down! I don't understand," Penny sputtered.

"It is a critical time for both the anti-war and women's movements. Too many people believed Nixon's hype about the war ending. Besides, we really have no idea how long we'll have to wait." Diana added. "You

could wait another six months before you get the go-ahead. We can always add new material for a second edition after your trip."

I agreed. "We can't lose the time."

In fact, the first 80 pages of the book were typeset and laid out when I received a telegram from the Viet Nam Women's Union dated July 19, 1974, *"You shall visit the DRV as our guest. Please arrive August 20."*

I immediately made reservations to fly via Singapore. Then, to save hundreds of dollars, I arranged to postpone the flight a week so I could catch a charter flight leaving from Paris.

Meanwhile a special delivery letter from the Internal Revenue Service arrived. It ordered me to appear for an income tax audit in San Francisco precisely on August 20. Penny and I were working on the text for the book cover. As we munched on a huge bowl of popcorn, she pointed out, for the umpteenth time, my dangling modifiers. I mused, "I know Nixon has bigger fish to fry than me, with my measly half-time lecturer's salary of less than $8,000 a year. This can't be an accident that they're ordering me to bring in proof of all my teaching expenses on the same day the telegram from Hanoi said I should arrive there."

"So you've made it onto Nixon's enemy list," Penny teased. "You should be proud."

I was a bit proud, but more relieved that their surveillance didn't yet show that I had already changed my travel plans.

Barely two years after Lincoln, my husband, left me, on August 26, 1974, Nancy moved into my house to be my "wife." We giggled as she repeatedly explained our commitment to the steady stream of visitors that day.

"We decided that for the 30 hours before Arlene leaves for Viet Nam, she needs help. A lot of help. She needs a secretary to answer the phone and tell her what not to pack for her trip. She needs someone to iron her travel clothes and someone to talk to about all her fears and worries. Like all of us, she needs a wife. I proposed. She accepted."

Nancy was 36 at the time—four years my senior. She had married

young, dropped out of college, had two kids and then divorced. She was blond, with long straight hair, buxom, and carried herself with the grace of a woman reared in the Episcopalian upper class of Michigan. When she was subpoenaed to testify to the Grand Jury against her close friends in SDS in 1970, the prosecutor was so impressed by her family name and demeanor, that he may have gone easier on her. Yet until her kids were nearly grown, Nancy, her son and daughter all subsisted on welfare. Whenever we went to a movie or out to eat, I routinely paid the bill. Our friendship began when we discovered we could confide in each other about our clandestine relationships with fugitive comrades in the Weather Underground. It grew over years of commiserating over lost lovers and political frustrations. With me, despite my growing attraction to women, she was always emphatically straight.

On the same day I had made plane reservations, I wrote to 40 or 50 contacts in a national network of anti-imperialist women's groups suggesting that they send me whatever information and solidarity gifts they wanted to give to the Vietnamese women. I also urged them to send me questions they wanted me to ask in Viet Nam. The Los Angeles Women's Union, like the ones in the Twin Cities, Boston area, New York and other cities all wanted to hear Vietnamese women's comments about how their struggle for liberation might continue after the war.

The Los Angeles Women's Liberation Union sent a solidarity letter for me to deliver to the Viet Nam Women's Union, "All of our chapters and the Union as a whole see ourselves as part of a worldwide struggle against imperialism, capitalism, sexism, racism and many other 'isms'...." An anti-imperialist coalition of women's organizations based in New York City ended their letter to the Viet Nam Women's Union with, "You have set a heroic example of women fighting for their liberation and the independence of their people. We are sending you these tapes as a symbolic gesture of our love and solidarity."

Nancy took charge of unwrapping and sorting the growing pile of special delivery packages. She wisely disregarded my suggestion that they be sorted politically. Instead, she sorted them according to size and shape to make packing easier. I ended up lugging three large suitcases full of poems, newspapers, posters, cards, letters, books, and school and medical supplies. A group of Women Health Workers affiliated with the San

Francisco Women's Union filled an entire suitcase with lab slides and other gynecological supplies.

In the spring of 1973, women at California Institute for Women (CIW)—at the time, the only state penitentiary for women—attended a series of workshops we had organized about women in Viet Nam. A year later, when they heard that I might be able to deliver them directly, they wrote letters to Vietnamese women political prisoners. One imprisoned woman wrote, "It's an honor to send our love and solidarity to your people—your example strengthens us in our daily fight. I sit here so far away, yet you are right next to my heart and soul, making a reality of our vision of freedom..." I tucked more than 20 of their handwritten letters and poems in a special compartment of my purse reserved for my passport and other essential documents.[12]

Our coordinating committee for the San Francisco Women's Union debated for days about how to make our gifts express our politics and to have a practical use. They also had to be lightweight and not too expensive. Finally, we decided on making 50 scarves in the style we had seen in photos of Vietnamese peasants. Instead of using the traditional Vietnamese black and white checkered fabric, we bought and hemmed plain white cotton and silk-screened on each scarf a circle formed by US and Vietnamese women holding hands with their fists raised. The words "solidarity" in English and Vietnamese (*doan kêt*) bordered the graphic. We also ordered several hundred pencils embossed with "Solidarity from the San Francisco Women's Union."

By the late afternoon on the day before I was to leave, the living room was full of women, including Diana, who came to see me off, share their suggestions and bring last minute donations of cash and medical supplies. In our community, most women worked low-paying jobs, so each contribution was precious. I also had a pile of questions I had been gathering—each on its own index card—to use to structure interviews in Viet Nam.

Finally, after months of anticipation and weeks of preparation, on

12 In 1975, People's Press published a collection of these letters and the Vietnamese response in a pamphlet called *From Women in Prison Here to Women of Viet Nam, We Are Sisters*. That pamphlet is available online at:

http://www.freedomarchives.org/Documents/Finder/DOC57scans/57.Vietnam.FromWomenToWomen.pdf

August 27th, Nancy and Penny squeezed into a VW bug, loaded with three large suitcases and me with as much carry-on baggage as I could manage. Another woman from People's Press had given me a blank check to pay for the overweight luggage costs. From the plane, flying east over the Sierras, I wrote in the leather-bound journal that Diana had given me as a safe-travels gift, "I feel I have so much to return to, so much responsibility, I must be worthy of everyone's support and love."

Although I had gotten only a couple of hours sleep the night before, sleeping on the plane was out of the question. My mind raced to the spring of 1965, in Berkeley, when I joined the Viet Nam Day Committee—the group that organized one of the first major anti-war teach-ins. Those of us who came of political age in the years when the Viet Nam War escalated learned that invasion and aggression had nothing to do with defending democracy. Both Democratic and Republican Presidents had lied. It became clear that the War grew from a larger system of domination—a system that not only attempted to force Viet Nam into submission, but also overthrew the democratically elected governments in Chile, Haiti, Iran, Congo and too many other countries. We concluded that the same system of domination relied on and reinforced oppression of Black people, other colonized people and many white women inside the US. Troops occupied the ghettoes like they occupied Viet Nam and although poverty, rapes, beatings and forced sterilization particularly threatened and pervaded Black and Brown women's lives, I was sure we were all targets of that same system of domination.

"Their victory is our victory," announced the flyers that advertised our workshops about Vietnamese women. We identified with their suffering. It fueled our hatred of the US government and its corporate backers. When we heard they shot down a plane or withstood torture, we were inspired. I was thrilled to make this pilgrimage to the revolutionary mecca of the worldwide movement for liberation.

Finally, on a late August morning, the thick tropical air of Viet Nam overwhelmed me as I emerged from an ancient Aeroflot plane parked on the tarmac of Hanoi's airport. Armed with huge bouquets of wildflowers, two young women in flowing white *áo dàis* and one older wom-

an, in traditional black loose pants and peasant shirt, waved from the ground. When I neared them, the older woman with her nearly bald head wrapped in a white band to symbolize mourning, reached for me. As we hugged, she kissed my cheek—a firm, long kiss and whispered in my ear. "Welcome to the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam, Arlene. We are honored by your visit. I am Vo Thi Thê."

The "welcome" made me smile. Hearing the name "Vo Thi Thê" made me choke up.

On the day I arrived in Viet Nam—before they even showed me to my room—Vo Thi Thê, Tuyen and others from the Women's Union ushered me into the lobby of the Hoa Binh Hotel. A huge ceiling fan creaked as it labored to move a mass of hot, humid, tropical air that hovered around a circle of worn leather couches probably left over from the original French owners. Once we settled onto a couch, Vo Thi Thê turned to me and smiled.

"Welcome to Hanoi. This is your home." She waved in the direction of an intricately carved, mahogany staircase. "This hotel used to host the elite of French colonial society. After they fled in 1954, we renamed it. 'Hoa Binh' means peace. Now only our friends stay here."

The walls of the lobby needed new paint, the frayed drapes needed replacing. Except for us, the reception area of this once grand hotel was empty. I wondered who had descended that staircase that seemed designed for visiting royalty. "Thank you. I am honored."

But, Vo Thi Thê had more than a formal welcome in mind.

"We have arranged some visits for you, based on those questions you mailed to us a long time ago. We'll have lots of meetings with Women's Union members and leaders who want to exchange views with you. We know you'll want to see schools, hospitals, villages. But, perhaps things have changed. Before we finalize your itinerary, we want to make sure of your wishes."

I reached into my purse for the stack of index cards that detailed all the questions I had carried from San Francisco. I had sorted them into topics like "women's role in the government." They were not arranged to identify places to visit. I paused and then without taking the rubber band off the pile, returned them to my purse and answered Vo Thi Thê, "I'm

HANOI, Viet Nam, September 1974. Vo Thi Thê (left) and Tuyen welcome Arlene at airport.

sure whatever you have planned will be great." My mind had gone blank. Besides, I totally trusted Thê. Then, I remembered my book and handed her a copy of *Women of Viet Nam,* which had emerged from the bindery only a few weeks earlier. "I hope you'll have time to review the book. I especially need your suggestions for improving the next edition."

She reached for the book and slowly turned it over several times, admired Jane Norling's art on the front cover and thumbed through it, stopping occasionally to remark on a drawing or photo. The others moved closer to see and she handed it to Tuyen. "Your book looks beautiful, Arlene. I look forward to reading it. Of course, I will let you know what I think. Now you must go upstairs and get some rest."

Those first days in Hanoi were filled with political sightseeing and welcome meetings where I shared the messages and gifts I had brought from the States. After a week, I squeezed into the back of a jeep, wedged between my hosts from the Women's Union, heading south on Route One towards the 17th parallel—toward "Viet Cong" territory. Tons and

tons of US bombs dropped on the Truong Son Mountains turned lush jungles to barren, dusty moonscape. Yet, all the bombs that US munitions factories could possibly produce never stopped people—mostly women—from transporting food and equipment from the North to South. US Army bulletins called it the "Ho Chi Minh Trail." In Viet Nam they called it the Truong Son Road.

Tuyen, my guide from the Women's Union, sat on my right. Like nearly all the women I had seen, she wore simple drawstring black pants, a long-sleeved white blouse and black rubber sandals made from the tires of abandoned US tanks. The faint curl of her short, pageboy hairstyle pointed to her beaming, ever-present smile. She kept a thin,cotton black and white checkered scarf hanging loosely over one shoulder and frequently dribbled some water from a canteen onto a corner of the scarf. With the damp cloth, she wiped the sweat and dust first off my face and then off hers. I protested at first. Her solicitude made me uncomfortable.

HA TINH PROVINCE, Viet Nam, September 1974. When Arlene questioned her Women's Union hosts about the work of most women (peasants), they arranged for their group to work in the rice fields.

Also, how could she use her scarf—an iconic, precious souvenir collected by anti-war activists—as a simple washcloth!

During the two days of travel over 300 miles of bombed out roads and pontoon bridges, she plied me with sticky rice, *xôi*, sprinkled with beans and raisins, and with questions about the women's movement in the States, my personal history and with reminiscences of her own early days in the struggle. At 42, she was one of the younger leaders of the International Section of the Women's Union. As a twelve-year-old student, she joined the anti-French resistance in Saigon. In 1954, at 22, she went North with the other cadre, expecting to return to her beloved home two years later when the Geneva Peace Treaty promised reunification.

Here we were twenty years later and Tuyen made no attempt to contain her excitement. Even if we could not travel all the way to Saigon, she would be able to walk on South Vietnamese soil for the first time in decades. While she told me her story, I looked past her, blinking away tears. She paused, "Oh, Arlene, I'm so sorry. I don't want to make you sad."

"Oh, no, I'm not crying because of what you're saying. I know you're happy to be able to travel South of the 17th parallel. I understand it's a victory to celebrate. I'm just feeling so sorry to see all this horrible destruction." I nearly poked her eye as I waved towards the fields that were now useless for crops, a swiss cheese of bomb craters. The road in front of us was so gutted we rarely drove faster than 20 kilometers an hour. Even at that speed, the bumps made my pen skitter and my writing illegible any time I tried to write a note in my journal. From the hundreds of people on foot who we passed, it seemed they transported everything in wicker baskets balanced at each end of carrying poles that stretched across their shoulders.

"We should have been able to stop this bombing," I groaned.

Tuyen laid her hand gently on my sternum. I think she was aiming to touch my heart. "Arlene, don't despair. It's not your fault. You and your friends have worked your hardest to stop the war. The destruction would have been a lot worse without your movement."

"You give us too much credit, Tuyen." It was one of many times during my stay in Viet Nam that I felt like a fraud. I thought about all the times we sat in comfortable living rooms debating strategy instead of

doing the harder work of knocking on doors or using our bodies to clog the gears of the war machine. "We could have done more. Much more," I mumbled.

A particularly violent jolt in the road jerked her hand off my chest. She laughed and took my hand firmly by the wrist. "You did your best. You know our enemy is your enemy and he is very strong. You will have many more chances to fight. Just don't give up."

Suddenly, we were no longer the only motorized vehicle on the road. A line of jeeps, trucks and carts, perhaps a mile long, stretched in front of us. Tuyen explained, "It's the line for the ferry. This is one of the few bridges we haven't been able to replace since the last bombing and the river is too wide here for pontoons."

Our driver swerved to the side of the line, then shocked me by accelerating. "What nerve," I thought. At home, I hated drivers who didn't wait their turn and cut in front just before reaching the toll booth. A man in a green camouflaged soldier's uniform was riding a bicycle in tandem with us. With his AK-47 flung over his shoulder, a bouquet of flowers tied to his front handlebars and two squawking chickens trussed up behind him, he steered nimbly around the potholes. I expected him and other cyclists, pedestrians and drivers to protest as we sped past them, maybe even to throw rocks at us. To my surprise, the soldier just waved and smiled.

Soon we arrived at the front of the line, and waited for the ferry to return to our shore. The soldier on the bike, more armed men and women in uniform and women laden with baskets of mint and rice balanced on carrying poles, surrounded us. I braced for an attack. I had read that their leadership told the Vietnamese people that the US government and the American people were different. That the government was their enemy, not the people. "No way," I thought. I knew better. Millions of American people had voted for Nixon and even though most GI's were drafted against their will, hundreds of US soldiers bragged about the number of "gooks" they had killed. The Vietnamese people must have known this too. I couldn't believe that now they were smiling at us and making Vee signs. We had just displayed arrogant American behavior, pushing to the front of their line.

Then, spontaneously, one of the women soldiers yelled something that sounded like, "*Cuubah don chi*!"

The others joined her. "*Cuubah don chi*!" They chanted. Then louder:

"Cuubah don chi! Cuubah don chi! Cuubah don chi!"

The chanting might have sounded menacing, except they were all smiling and Tuyen was laughing. "They're saying 'Cuba, comrade,'" she translated. "They think you belong to one of the Cuban medical teams or construction brigades who are here to help us."

Then I really felt like a fraud. "Tuyen, what would they do if they knew I was from the US?"

"Oh," she paused. "We would tell them you are against the US government, that you too are here to help us."

"Would they believe it?"

Tuyen laughed again. American cynicism seemed really strange to her. "Of course! Why would we invite the enemy to be our guest? You are our guest."

"Tuyen, remember you told me that all Party cadre learn to practice the 'Three Togethers'?"

She nodded agreeably. "Stay together with the masses—when working, eating, living."

With my eye on the shaky planks that would convey our jeep onto the ferry, I teased. "Aren't we violating all three—we're not working with the masses, we're not eating with them and we live apart from them?"

"Oh, no, Arlene. You are our guest here. You should, however, practice the three togethers when you're home, in your own country."

I knew she was right, but I could not imagine spending much time with a bunch of racist, materialist, sexist, homophobic white Americans, let alone live with them. I had accepted that a revolutionary had to sacrifice for the struggle and had assumed that meant risking imprisonment or even death. Tuyen made me realize I needed to consider a less romantic, more tedious kind of sacrifice. My confidence drained. I could not imagine myself a true revolutionary.

As the ferry left the shore, I felt an urgent, almost desperate need to hear how Tuyen herself learned to practice the Three Togethers. "Tell me, Tuyen, you were a student when you joined the liberation struggle against the French, a literature student, a city girl, right?"

She nodded.

"How did you learn to work, eat and live among the peasants?"

Tuyen gazed out across the river and thought longer than usual before she answered. "My mother was a small merchant—well enough off to send three of us kids to school. By Vietnamese standards we were bourgeois, but I left for the liberated zone in the countryside when I was 16."

I interjected. "That was very brave of you."

"I was more foolish than brave," Tuyen continued. "I had a hot temper and it wasn't safe for me to stay in Saigon. My teachers reported my anti-French tirades to the authorities. In the liberated zone I made a lot of mistakes. Every week the comrades got together for a self-criticism/criticism meeting. I often blundered and the comrades gave me criticism. But it was friendly criticism, not heavy." Her small hands became fists and she pounded the air to emphasize how heavy the criticism might have been.

"I was very idealistic and expected everything in the liberated zone to be perfect. I would get angry and show contempt for people who were 'too individualistic,' or not 'militant' enough by my standards. The older comrades taught me not to be so harsh in my judgments of others and, above all, to control my temper," she concluded.

I wondered if Tuyen realized she was describing my own weaknesses. I promised myself that when I returned home, I would try to remember Tuyen's gentle advice.

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We visited a village—just north of the 17th parallel. Tuyen put her finger across my lips when I called it the "border." "NO!" she said with an insistence I hadn't heard from her before. "It's the temporary demarcation line between north and south." There, where US planes dropped an average of 94 bombs per person, I met with a women's anti-aircraft unit. I sat around a circular table with that group of seven women—all under twenty-two years old. We were in a thatched roof hut. The sound

of the sea accompanied their proud accounts of how they had shot down eight planes. They took turns talking, all the while holding each other's hands, rubbing each other's shoulders and playing with each other's hair. I yearned to join their group, whose shared risks, bravery, and military feats had bonded them in an intimate collective.

At another village, people had survived the bombing by living, for two years, in tunnels they dug into the side of a mountain. There, a group of older women—in their fifties and sixties—veterans of two liberation wars—honored me with a feast made from the first crops they had been able to harvest in many years. "We had a slogan during the bombing," announced the woman whose chopsticks were holding a dumpling in front of my mouth.

I didn't know which to do first: bite into the dumpling or ask about the slogan. She shook the dumpling. I obeyed and bit into it. She continued, "The slogan was 'even if we have to use the wood from our homes, we will keep the road to the front open.'" The others nodded, and reached across the table for their favorite dishes. One poured a clear liquid into my tea cup. "Let's toast our friendship. You helped stop the bombing. The Association of Vietnamese Mothers welcomes you as a daughter." I took a sip of the sweet rice wine and wondered how my life would have been if I had had a mother with their political understanding and determination.

Throughout the weeks the Viet Nam Women's Union hosted me, during that six-day jeep trip, during stays in guest houses with no running water or electricity and stays in Hanoi's Hoa Binh Hotel and the newly-built guest house in Quảng Trị Province—the same one that hosted Fidel Castro—I was treated like a visiting dignitary. Invariably in meetings with peasants, teachers, workers, doctors, market women, poets, journalists, women who had been in prison, tortured and bombed, widows and women whose children died, teenage militia women and seventy-year-old grandmothers, women who had been concubines and women who were high-level government officials, they all made me feel like a beloved, long lost family member.

On the morning that I left Quảng Trị Province—I could hear anti-aircraft fire in the distance. A US plane was violating the Ceasefire Agreement, but no one in our group paid any attention. I too stayed

calm, sure that we were well defended. Bùi Thị Mè, the Vice Minister of Health of the Provisional Revolutionary Government of South Viet Nam took me by the hand as we walked to the jeep. She stopped a few feet from the vehicle. She had lost her husband, two sons, a brother and her best friend in the War, but her eyes still sparkled with confidence and kindness. Although she was an arm's length away, I felt kissed by her smile. She must have noticed I was fighting back tears. She kept my hand warm in hers.

"Arlene. Don't be sad. **We are part of the worldwide family of militant women.** We will meet again—next time in Ho Chi Minh City, or maybe Paris or even New York."

Then she let go of my hand and turned to go. "Thank you very much," I yelled. Then searched for words that came nearer to conveying my emotions. "Thank you. I love you. Your victory will be ours."

QUANG TRI, Viet Nam, September 1974. Bui Thi Me, Vice Minister of Health of the Provisional Revolutionary Government of South Viet Nam hosted Arlene in liberated territory, south of 17th parallel, before the country was reunified. Arlene first heard the phrase, "Worldwide family of militant women," from her.

For the next four weeks, each time I saw Vo Thi Thê, I anticipated: "this time she's going to give me feedback on my book." Yet, each time, when I noticed she carried nothing but a small purse—too small to hold my book, I consoled myself, "Hopefully tomorrow." Finally, a few nights before I was scheduled to leave, to board the train for the two-day ride north to Peking, I was in my hotel room, feeling miserable about leaving Viet Nam and a little disoriented because it was the first night that no meetings were scheduled. The tropical heat drove me to the shower. Long ago, Tuyen had apologized for the lack of hot water, but I didn't mind. Even after a cold shower, I began to sweat before I had a chance to dry off. So, instead of dressing Vietnamese style in a long-sleeved cotton blouse and pants, I just wrapped myself in a sarong—without even bothering to put on a bra or underpants.

I thought I might use the free time to shuffle through the index cards to double check if I still had any unanswered questions. Instead, I opened the doors to the balcony and stroked the huge banana leaves that brushed it. Although we were in the center of the city, the street below was nearly empty. It was dusk and only the occasional bicycle bell broke the silence. I enjoyed the quiet, and mused how the admiration I had felt for the abstract "Vietnamese women" had turned to a very palpable love for Thê, Tuyen, Xuyen and their sisters. "This trip has really exceeded my wildest dreams," I mused.

Then, I heard a knock on the huge mahogany door. They had given me a skeleton key that looked like it was one hundred years old. I never used it. Without thinking about my state of undress—scandalous by Vietnamese standards—I called from the balcony, "Come in, it's not locked." Vo Thi Thê and Tuyen opened the door, but when they saw me, they froze at the threshold and giggled. Not wanting to offend them, until that night, I had gone out of my way never to expose my bare arms and there I was, practically naked.

"I'm sorry, I didn't realize it was you," I stammered lamely and reached for a sheet to cover myself while I rifled through my suitcase for a clean shirt. "Excuse me. I'll be dressed in a minute," and moved towards the bathroom.

Thê raised her hand in a stop signal. "Don't take the time, Arlene. We can't stay long. We came to talk about your book. It doesn't matter what you're wearing. Didn't we tell you that this is your home!" She sat on the bed and motioned for me to sit beside her. Tuyen sat on the chair at the desk. The two of them kicked their sandals off, leaving the three of us barefoot.

Vo Thi Thê reached inside a briefcase for the book and waved it in front of me, "Arlene. This is a precious book. You have done very good work and have a good understanding of our struggle." She paused. I shifted so I could lean against the baseboard of the bed, still feeling the tension of a young girl waiting as the teacher returned a graded final exam. Thê's smile widened and she continued, "And your book has so much energy. It's a very good style. Not monotone like ours." We all laughed. My tension dissolved. I expected she might make one or two more general comments, then stop. Instead, she opened the book where Chapter One began.

"Here you present women's role in the old society and give clear examples of feudalism and patriarchy. Very good." She turned the now-worn pages quickly to Chapter Two, pointed out the folk tales she especially liked and moved on to Chapter Three. "On page 54, Arlene, there is a small confusion." She patted my leg affectionately before I could begin to worry about the criticism. "Yes? Tell me." I asked, with my pen poised over my spiral notebook.

"The Emperor Bảo Đại—France's puppet—did not flee Hanoi the same day that Ho Chi Minh declared independence from France. He fled before. Also, although you say it elsewhere, it might be a good idea to repeat here: Viet Nam was a unified state at that time." I nodded, jotted a note and she moved on. "The chapter you call 'The Politics of Rape in Viet Nam' is very important. What you write about the psychology of the US soldier is very interesting. We didn't have that understanding before. We will translate this chapter so that all our women will learn how rape is an unwritten US policy. Thank you for giving us this understanding."

I glowed. I could not imagine a more wonderful compliment. They not only wanted women in the US to read my book, they also wanted their own women to read it. For the first time I felt like I had made a

contribution to their struggle—like I might have deserved a small bit of the appreciation I had received at all those meetings and meals they had hosted for me. I hardly heard the next positive comments until Vo Thi Thê got to page 104. Tears came to her eyes as she pointed to a photo of a woman staring blankly into the camera. She was naked from the waist up. Her mutilated left breast was partially covered with a Band-Aid. I remembered how we had debated whether to use that photo as evidence of the torture by the US-sponsored regime in the South. The caption read, "Thieu's victim."

Thê dabbed her eyes and whispered, "That's my friend, Tran Thi Ly. She was captured and tortured by Diem—the first Vietnamese dictator to serve the US"

"Oh, I'm so sorry." I shuddered, not so much over my error but over Thê's loss.

"It's ok." Thê reached and hugged me. "We know you share our sorrows."

Thê resumed pointing out pages or paragraphs that she liked and occasionally suggested a minor correction. Then, when she was about halfway through the book, at the end of the chapter that introduced the section on women's role in resistance, she bit her lip. "Arlene, your presentation gives a clear, deep impression of our struggle, except here." She pointed to three lines about the "Three Responsibilities Movement." "This isn't so clear."

I thought about the conversation I had had with Tuyen in the jeep about the "Three Togethers," smiled and thought to myself, "Maybe I just had a problem with this "three-whatevers" campaign approach." Thê gave me the benefit of the doubt. "Maybe it's because you imply that the 'Three Responsibilities' were the same in the North and the South."

No, I realized the problem went much deeper than a matter of how I organized the material. Ordinarily, in self-criticism/criticism sessions back home, I would have welcomed the opportunity to dismiss the seriousness of a criticism. Yet there, in the heat of that Hanoi night, sitting barefoot in a sarong on the bed next to one of the national leaders of the Viet Nam Women's Union, a veteran of two wars, who had honored and appreciated my work more than anyone else, I had an epiphany. She had

made me feel so confident of the value of my book, I eagerly welcomed the opportunity to deepen the criticism.

Any attempt to avoid the implications of the problem paragraph would have disrespected this woman who I had grown to love, who treated me as a daughter and comrade. I stood up and kept my voice low, even, but emphatic: "No, I think the problem is more serious. I neglected a full discussion of the Three Responsibilities deliberately, because I didn't like that campaign."

Thê tilted her head signaling her confusion.

I tried to explain, "It sounded to me like the Three Responsibilities—for production, the family, and the front—reinforced patriarchal stereotypes about women. I thought that too much emphasis on the Three Responsibilities would turn reformist feminist women in the US against us. They might not want to join the anti-war movement if they thought the struggle kept women in their traditional roles." I knew I had scratched a political scab. Maybe they would decide I wasn't such a comrade after all, but I had to be honest. I sat back down on the bed and braced myself for Vo Thi Thê's response:

"Arlene, you must have more faith in the women of your country. Tell them the truth. You show them how we have abolished polygamy and how the Women's Union protects women against men who try to beat them. You show them how we now run local village councils, schools, factories and farms. You show them how we are generals and foreign ministers—so why can't you show them that we are proud of our special roles and feelings as mothers? They will understand that motherhood doesn't have to be a patriarchal trap."

I interrupted, "I know it doesn't have to be a patriarchal trap when there's free childcare, schooling and health care. But on a cultural level, can women be truly liberated if they cannot choose NOT to be mothers." Tuyen, at least 20 years younger than Vo Thi Thê, finally spoke. "I don't understand. Most of us—and when I say 'us' I mean Women's Union cadre—have chosen not to be mothers. I didn't see my daughter for eight years when I came north and we are honored members of society."

"Yes, but..." I paused, wondering if I should continue—if I were being an arrogant Westerner, even a cultural imperialist, or a sectarian bourgeois feminist, attempting to impose my values. I decided to lighten up.

"I understand we live in very different worlds. It is wrong for me to assume the goals of our women's movement at this time should be your goals. For that matter they are not even the goals of most women in the US. Black women have often set different priorities and lead their own organizations and masses of bourgeois white women don't want anything to do with our anti-imperialist women's liberation movement."

Tuyen nodded and Vo Thi Thê clapped. "That's it, Arlene. You must have respect for all those women. The struggle for women's liberation may take many forms—but eventually, have faith that all women will realize that—whether they're working for child care or the end to rape or the end to war, their freedom also requires the defeat of imperialism." She paused and concluded, "Arlene, you are a strong fighter. But we all must get some sleep. I will give you the rest of my comments about your wonderful book tomorrow during the lunch break." She grabbed my hand as she rose and pulled me up with her. "Good night, Arlene. Sleep well." Tuyen watched as Vo Thi Thê kissed me and then she took her turn.

After they left, I hooked up the mosquito net, turned off the light, and expected to fall asleep immediately. Instead, I replayed Thê's words in my head until I turned on the light and reached for my journal. I needed to record all the details of what I had learned that night. After that, I still couldn't sleep trying to figure out how to convince Thê to let me stay and work with her in Hanoi.[13]

13 For more on the Women's Union see Eisen (1975) and (1984) in Recommended Reading.

Trans-Siberian Railroad (1974)

I had no return plane ticket from Hanoi to Paris and no money to buy one. Once the Burmese Embassy in Hanoi refused my request for a visa, I had no passable land route out of Hanoi except through Peking. Nixon had already visited China, but China and the US had yet to establish diplomatic relations and only a handful of people traveled to China with US passports.

Vo Thi Thê had misgivings about me visiting China. Viet Nam and China were still officially allies. Yet the image of Mao Zedong shaking the hand of Richard Nixon, the Commander-in-Chief who had ordered more bombs dropped on Viet Nam than were dropped during the entire World War II, announced that the Vietnamese no longer could count on their former ally. Still, when I asked her to help me arrange a visit to the Chinese Embassy, she did.

She accompanied me to the ornate building, but waited for me outside in the car as I entered the visitors' welcoming room. The room, elaborately decorated in red and gold, was more luxurious than any Vietnamese office I had visited. The embassy's third secretary greeted me, "Why do you want to visit our country?" He was too polite to ask, "How do we know we can trust you?" I had prepared an answer. Although Lincoln and I had been separated for two years, I could not imagine the Chinese Embassy in Hanoi—or even the Party officials in Peking responsible for international relations—would keep track of such information. I decided that my marriage to Lincoln might endear me more to Chinese officials than my book about Vietnamese women. I forced myself to ignore Lincoln's betrayal and declared brightly,

"I am Arlene Eisen Bergman—the wife of Lincoln Bergman who worked at the Foreign Languages Institute in Peking in 1965. My father-in-law is Leibel Bergman who lived and worked in Peking for almost three years. Since they returned to the States, I've been hearing their reports of the People's Republic of China. I hope now, I can learn for myself directly about the latest accomplishments of the PRC."

"Oh, I see. I will have to consult my comrades. Would you kindly come back tomorrow?"

When I returned to the Chinese Embassy the next day, the second secretary met me at the door with a broad smile. "Comrade Bergman, we are delighted you want to visit China. For many years, your father-in-law has been a close comrade-in-arms of the People's Republic. You are welcome to visit in Peking as our guest. How long would you like to stay?"

Vo Thi Thê insisted I purchase a first class ticket for the 1800-mile train ride from Hanoi to Peking. I would stay in Peking for two weeks, then board the train in Peking and arrive in Moscow six days later. From Moscow, I would arrange for the final leg of the trip back to Paris, via Finland Station and Stockholm. I had no idea what to expect but the anticipation of seeing 8000 miles of the world through a train window, aroused my appetite for adventure.

The day of my scheduled departure from Hanoi, Vo Thi Thê and Tuyen knocked on the door of my hotel room at 5:30AM. "Are you ready, Arlene?" Tuyen yelled when I didn't answer the knock immediately. I had dreaded this day. No degree of excitement about taking the Trans-Siberian Railroad could offset the sadness I felt. Vo Thi Thê, about my mother's age, had shared both her wisdom and affection with me in a way my own mother never could. I loved Tuyen as the older sister I never had. Without them I would be orphaned, without a mother, teacher or sister. I had no idea when, or even if, I might return to Viet Nam. I was inconsolable.

Although I must have weighed fifty pounds more than Tuyen, she insisted on carrying my two large suitcases—now filled with books, posters and other gifts they had given me. Once we were settled in the car, as we headed towards the train station, Tuyen handed me a multi-colored mesh basket. "Here's food for your trip—sticky rice, guava and the sesa-

me candy you like. Some Vietnamese tea too. We want you to remember us each time you get thirsty."

Its weight surprised me. Vo Thi Thê added, "That basket will last forever." She smiled, the smile I had learned to recognize as the introduction of some humorous tidbit of Vietnamese lore. "The basket is heavy because it's made from the wires we recycled and wove from American bombs."

Finally, I stood on the platform, forlorn and facing the train I was supposed to board. I was wearing the Vietnamese blue cotton shirt they had tailored for me, black satin-like pajama pants and black rubber sandals made from the discarded tires of abandoned US trucks and tanks. A porter stared at me and looked quizzically at Vo Thi Thê as he relieved Tuyen of my bags.

"You look like you're a Vietnamese militia woman headed towards the front," Tuyen flashed her mischievous smile and squeezed my hand.

"I wish."

"We would like to ride all the way to the border with you," Vo Thi Thê became serious. "But that is not possible. You had better get on the train now."

Reluctantly, I obeyed, climbed the steps, followed the porter a few paces and sat in the compartment where he had deposited my bags. I threw open the window and reached for them with two arms. I held Vo Thi Thê's hand with one of mine, and Tuyen's with the other. "Make sure to write to us as soon as you get to Paris. Let us know you are safe. Then when you get home, write to us about your victories. We promise we will always answer," Vo Thi Thê called out.

At that moment, the sky unleashed a torrential tropical rain. In seconds, our shirt sleeves were soaked but we still clung to each other's hands. I prayed the train would be delayed. There was so much more to say. Instead, the train lurched forward. We let go. Tuyen ran alongside the train, while Vo Thi Thê stood, waved and called out, "We will meet again in Paris, Canada, Danang, Hanoi, or even Ho Chi Minh City. You know our victory is certain."

Their words comforted me like Bùi Thị Mè's farewell, "We are part

of the worldwide family of militant women…" I could not lose this family.

The train picked up speed and they were gone. I could not believe it was only a few minutes after seven. As if I were a baby, I pacified myself with one of the balls of sticky rice. I took very small bites, aiming to make the food from my Vietnamese family last forever. Between nibbles, I still whimpered and stared blankly at the land, pockmarked with bomb craters, racing past. It was more sparsely settled than the Vietnamese countryside to the south of Hanoi. Only a magnificent variety of wild flowers—reds, purples, yellows—interrupted my gloom.

By noon, the peasants I saw from the train window no longer wore traditional Vietnamese work clothes. Their tops were navy and slit in Chinese style. Also in Chinese style, I saw, for the first time, terraced fields. Soon, a young Vietnamese woman knocked on the wall next to the open door of my compartment. She identified herself in heavily accented English.

"My name is Hue. I work for the Vietnamese Immigration and Customs Authority. I just want to chat with you, to practice my English. Is that OK with you? I'm sorry. My English is not so good." She gripped my leg and added, "Thank you for being a good American friend of Viet Nam." Except for the Vietnamese official who gently took the Vietnamese visa out of my passport and returned the passport with no trace of my time in Viet Nam, Hue was the last Vietnamese contact I had inside Viet Nam. In less than six hours after leaving Hanoi, we arrived at Dong Dang, the border station, and transferred to a Chinese train that ran on wider tracks. Within minutes, the view from the window changed dramatically. Smoothly paved roads, many-tiered power lines, brick buildings, not shacks, all seemed so unfamiliar. There was no more denying that my time in Viet Nam had ended.

❧

After two weeks in Peking, early in the evening, my guide escorted me to the Peking Railroad Station. Chi-Su rattled off the statistics about how it took seven months to build the railroad station, and how many cubic centimeters it was. She was delivering me to the track where I would board the Soviet train. I scanned the platform hoping, in vain, to find a

friendly Vietnamese traveler to smile at. A crowd of Soviets jammed the platform adjacent to the first-class car. They were bidding farewell to a friend who was leaving China for good. I had paid 144 yuan—about $75 then—for a first-class ride from Peking to Moscow. Chi-Su stared with disapproval at them and warned me: "Be careful. It's a very long trip—7 nights and six days. You'll pass through five time zones. You're a woman traveling alone. Do you speak Russian?"

"No." Despite her misgivings, I was ready to board. I needed no more time in China to learn that Chinese children were singing the praises of the friendship between Chairman Mao and President Nixon. The Winter Palace, the Great Wall and the Ming Tombs were impressive. Sadly, my heart was still in Viet Nam and I felt China's betrayal of my Vietnamese sisters personally. It violently rattled my faith in the Chinese Revolution.

I took my guide's hand. There would be no hugs, no tears. Just a formal, "Thank you for your help. I appreciate how hard you worked to teach me about China. Thank you very much."

She smiled as I climbed the few steps to the train. The porter took my baggage and ushered me to my compartment. I looked out the window to wave, but she was already gone.

I scanned the compartment that would be home for the next seven days and hung my new fur-lined blue denim Mao jacket on the hook next to the door. It was October 19. I knew winter started early in Siberia, and was thankful I had found a used clothing market in Peking just before I left. That jacket, plus several layers of tropical clothing would have to keep me warm. I had no room in my luggage, or money, for a winter wardrobe.

The porter pushed my bags under one of the berths and pointed out the cabinets above the berths where I could find sheets and blankets to cover the red-velvet upholstered berths if I wanted to rest before he came to make my bed in the evening. Then he swung open a side door to show me my private washbasin and mirror. A vase of red flowers and a thermos of hot water sat on a long table between the berths. "That table would be perfect for sorting through my journals and writing," I thought. As he left, he remarked apologetically, that the "WC" (toilet) was at the end of the car and the dining car was two cars to the right.

I exhaled, pulled out the suitcase that contained my journals, toiletries, change of underwear and a photo of me, Vo Thi Thê, Tuyen and some of the others at the Women's Union headquarters. I propped the photo against the thermos, piled my journals next to it and arranged the other items in the cabinet above the berth I decided to sleep on—the one facing west.

A haze of air thick with cigarette smoke permeated my compartment. I heard men's voices speaking loudly in Russian in the corridor and decided to keep my door closed for a while. I needed to settle in and begin indexing my journals. I was determined to index all 800 pages and write at least one article that I could mail back home from the first accessible post office. Before I poured myself a cup of hot water for tea, I opened the window to clear the foul air, but a startling rush of arctic cold air made me slam it shut.

No moon or stars illuminated the darkness outside the window. The water in the thermos was tepid, too cool to steep tea. I had figured I would have tea and sesame candy for dinner. I had no choice but to leave my compartment to refill the thermos from the tank of boiling water at the end of the corridor. As I emerged from my compartment, a short, pudgy balding white man, holding a stainless steel cup full of clear liquid, blocked my way. He didn't smile, but switched his cup from his right to left hand, extended his right and said something in Russian. His breath stank of vodka.

"I'm sorry. I do not speak Russian. Do you speak English?"

He answered with barely a trace of Russian accent, "Of course I speak English. Everyone in the Soviet Foreign Ministry speaks English. My name is Ike. Now, tell me sweetie, what's a pretty American girl like you doing on this train?"

I ignored his question. After two months in Viet Nam and China—where I had encountered not a hint of sexual harassment—I was momentarily shocked. My stomach churned a bile of anger and frustration. Instinctively, I held the thermos up as a shield to protect my breasts. He had me trapped, but he offered me his diplomat's smile.

"Excuse me, would you please let me pass? I need to get some hot water."

"Oh, of course, my girl. By all means. But wouldn't you rather share some vodka with us?" He motioned to six or seven men who had congregated in the corridor, each holding a stainless steel cup and a lit cigarette.

"No thank you. I don't drink." I tried hard to sound like an aristocratic teetotaler.

"But don't you want to hear about our views on China and the Soviet Union?"

"Perhaps I could hear more about that later, but now I must get some hot water." I gambled that his inebriation had not yet reached the belligerent stage and gently pushed his arm down so I could pass. I quickly rushed to the end of the corridor and was relieved that he didn't follow me. Of course, he had no need to follow me. He knew I would return to my compartment, so he positioned himself in front of my door. I considered avoiding him by heading to the dining car or looking for help from the porter. Instead, I decided that since we would both be in that same first class car for another six days, I needed to establish my safe zone by myself.

When I returned, Ike, who was still standing in front of my door, tried to apologize. "I'm sorry. I am drunk. I am drunk because I am so happy to be leaving China with its dreadful, evil people. We should drop an atomic bomb on them to prevent the whole world from turning yellow." He may have been drunk, but not too drunk to see the shock and disapproval on my face. "What did you say!" I wasn't asking. I was accusing.

"No one has suffered in war like the Russian people. Remember Leningrad when only a third of our people survived the Nazi siege! That is why we love peace more than anyone."

Before I could remind him of the millions of Chinese who had died during the Japanese occupation or Vietnamese who were still dying, he reached out and grabbed my butt. "You must understand." He slurred and shook the hand that was still pinching my flesh.

"And you must leave me alone." In what felt like one frantic motion, I hit his arm, pushed him aside so I could enter my compartment, slammed and locked the door before he recovered.

I sat shaking in my compartment, which by then, felt like a red-velvet-lined cage. "How would I manage to avoid him for the six remaining days of the journey? I could pee in my private wash basin and try to limit my forays to the WC and dining car to times when I could hear sober voices in the corridor.

Yet, Ike wasn't finished. He banged on the door. "Please listen to me. Don't blame me for acting like an African. I'm too drunk and happy. We'll be at the border soon."

I said nothing but heard his friends say something in Russian. Then I heard them leave the corridor. I was still shaking—partly from fear and anger at his crudely racist parting shot and partly because the temperature outside was dropping quickly.

❧

For most of the rest of the days I rode in that train across Siberia, I might have been in any sequestered space. I stared out the window, fascinated and spooked by the endless miles of barren snow. With not a sign of a bomb crater or demolished building or bridge, the land was at peace. Yet questions gnawed at my peace. What had this trip taught me as a revolutionary woman from the US—a student of Marxism-Leninism—about how to put my commitments into practice? That question became the organizing principle for indexing my journals. At the same time, the train's rhythmic pounding, like a thousand hoofers tap dancing in unison, comforted me, reminded me that I had no meetings, no demonstrations, no interviews, no presentations, no classes, no schedule at all. I could relax.

It had not been three weeks since I left tropical Viet Nam when sub-zero temperatures at the train stations along the Mongolian Trans-Siberian route, prevented me from leaving the train. With Ike and the other Soviet travelers out on the platform, furiously bargaining with station vendors, I felt safer. I stayed behind, seeking out the Vietnamese laborers and diplomats who were traveling to Moscow in the second class cars. They also lacked clothing warm enough to venture onto the platform for exercise and fresh yogurt.

Between my passport pages, I guarded a carefully-folded article that had appeared in the Vietnamese daily newspaper, *Nhan Dan,* that report-

ed on our trip south of the "temporary demarcation line." When Tuyen first translated the article for me, I realized how all those meetings with groups of women guerrillas, in hospitals, schools, agricultural coops, were not only for my benefit. "I don't need to hear another report about the war damage to their village and the heroic struggle the women waged to send food to the front," I had sometimes groaned to myself, when Tuyen or Vo Thi Thê told me we were about to visit our third village council that day. From the *Nhan Dan* article I realized my presence—a young woman from the US anti-war movement, in the flesh—boosted their morale. My smiles, nods, handshakes, hugs, kisses, and solidarity gifts were evidence of what they had been told: "the people of the world were on their side."

Now, on this train taking me further and further away from my Vietnamese family, I sought out Vietnamese travelers. I first found them huddled together in their poorly-heated, hard-benched compartments drinking tea and sharing sesame candy. Phan's itchy gray blanket fell from her shoulders as she offered me a candy. In pidgin English and Vietnamese, she told me she was a medical doctor from the southern part of Viet Nam, headed to Moscow for specialized studies of leukemia. I told her I was from the United States, San Francisco, California, to be exact. She looked at me skeptically. "No Cuba!" We had no more common words, so I handed her the *Nhan Dan* article. She read it aloud to the others. Once she interrupted her reading to point to a place in the article and then to me. I nodded, pointed to my chest and then to the article. They all clapped. I stood there saying "*cam un, cam un,* thank you, thank you."

After a couple of days of threading my way from the front to the back of the line of cars whenever we stopped, I concluded I was the only Westerner and only woman traveling alone on that train. I had never thought of myself as a trailblazer, but my unique status, at least on that train, made me smile to myself momentarily. "Strange," I thought. "This venture does not require any heroism, only a capacity for solitary work and loneliness."

Very early on the third morning, as I made my way to the WC at the end of the car, the conductor pointed out the window at a frozen shoreline that extended to a huge expanse of ice and then unfrozen water. I was confused. I couldn't figure out what ocean this might be.

"Lake Baikal," he beamed.

"Oh." I couldn't remember what I had heard about Lake Baikal. Was it the largest body of freshwater in the world? The deepest? The longest? For the rest of the morning and into the afternoon, whenever I looked up from my journals, beautiful stalagmite-like ice formations along the shoreline greeted me. Finally, the conductor announced, "Irkutsk." Did I hear him properly? At last, a familiar name. I remembered that Lincoln had spoken of visiting Irkutsk. I could see a portrait of Lenin—in the same position I had seen heads of Mao in China and Ho Chi Minh in Viet Nam—looking down onto the station's platform. I decided, although my sandaled feet would freeze, to brave the cold for a few minutes, just to sample the fresh air of this famous city.

The next morning, it was still dark out when I woke with a terrible cold. I reached for the light so I could see my watch. It was almost 7AM. I hadn't yet adjusted my watch from Peking time. I decided to move the watch back by two hours—a rather arbitrary decision because since we passed the barbed wire area separating China from the Soviet Union two or three days ago, the clocks at all stations were set to Moscow time. Despite an attempt to estimate local time by the sun's position, I had a sense that I was hurtling through a timeless zone in some sort of space machine. Especially once the sky turned cloudy—it seemed like dawn lasted all day long.

Late on the fourth day—or was it the fifth—I gave up trying to avoid Ike. When he knocked on my door, instead of pretending I was napping, I warily opened it. "Good evening." His smile was defenseless as if there had never been any tension between us. "We have organized a cocktail party to celebrate."

"To celebrate what?" Then I sneezed.

"Ahhh. You have a cold. Come have some Russian champagne and vodka with us. It will do your health good. Besides, tonight we climb the Urals. Tomorrow we will be in the real Russia. Europe."

"OK, thank you." My scratchy throat whined for some alcohol. "I'll be right there."

They had a small pyramid of unopened bottles of champagne and vodka, waiting on the floor next to the table. On the table, they had arranged several tins of sardines, smoked salmon, mussels, and one tin of

prized caviar around a huge loaf of dark bread. Jars of pickled cucumbers, pickled cabbage, tomatoes and other vegetables, a plate of cake and bowl of candy filled the rest of the table. I added my last can of baby Chinese clams to the spread. I had been drinking tea all day and "starving my cold." I was very hungry.

Peter, the only one of their party who didn't speak English, a carpenter who had worked at their Embassy in Peking, cut into the slab of bread, placed it on a cloth napkin that looked like it came from the dining car and handed it to me along with a glass of champagne. The liquid tasted like Seven Up. I emptied the glass quickly.

Once we were all eating, Ike took a cassette player out of his bag and asked me if I had any American jazz.

"No, I'm sorry. I only have Vietnamese music with me."

"Well, maybe you want to hear my favorite."

I nodded to be polite.

He shuffled through his duffle bag and produced the cassette he had been looking for. "Here it is, *Jesus Christ Superstar*."

I must have frowned.

"What, don't you like it?" He held the cassette up, as if to exhibit it to his comrades at the table. "You must like it—it's an American classic."

He rewound the tape and pressed play again. "Let's toast our safe arrival in Moscow."

I lifted my glass. "Yes, to our safe arrival in Moscow."

Then Ike's tone became more serious and I could not avoid his empty eyes. "What exactly will you do in Moscow, Arlene?"

"Frankly, I don't know. I don't have any plans, except I do want to see Lenin's tomb. I don't even know how long I will stay."

They looked at each other as if I were a very strange creature.

Ike pressed on: "What do you mean you don't have any plans. You must have plans. What does your visa say? They don't give visas so easily at the Soviet Embassy in Peking."

Until then, I had successfully repressed memories of my unpleas-

ant visit to the Embassy in Peking on a street the Chinese had renamed, "Combat Revisionism Street." Embassy staff had greeted me with suspicion and grilled me for more than an hour. "What was I doing in China? What did I do in the States? Did I have proof I had been in Viet Nam? Tell us again why you want to go to the USSR?" I told them that the trip from Hanoi to Moscow by train would cost less than $100 and to fly would cost almost $800. I was poor. When they finally handed me that small, official-looking paper, I shook their hands and left, without questioning what it said.

"Well, after they asked a lot of questions, they did give me a visa. But I have no idea what the visa says. It's all in Russian. Here." I reached into the back pocket of my jeans where I kept my thinning stash of twenty-dollar bills and my passport and handed him the visa.

He studied it carefully and finally reported. "I've never seen a visa like this. It's ambiguous. I'm not sure if it's good for 24 hours, 3 days or 30 days and by the time you get to Moscow, you will have been in the USSR more than three days. It's like a transit visa. You better go to the Intourist Office as soon as you arrive."

"Intourist Office? Is it close to the train station.?" I should have been alarmed, but wasn't. I could not imagine the diplomats in Peking deliberately gave me a useless visa. Besides, now that we had broken bread together, I assumed Ike would help me. When we finally pulled into Moscow station two days later, it was almost six in the evening. The platform was a blur of people dragging out their luggage, waving to waiting families and shooing away vendors and beggars. In the midst of the chaos, I looked for Ike or Peter or any familiar face to help me with my bags, to show me the way to the Intourist Office, or even to escort me there. They were gone without even a formal "goodbye." There I was alone, on the platform with no map, no common language, no rubles, no visa and no warm shoes.

Still, I wasn't alarmed. Surely, someone would help me, but only a band of beggars approached. Their presence shocked me. Although I knew that the Soviet Union was far from an ideal socialist country, I assumed they still had some safety net for poor people. A policeman shooed them away and began to question me in Russian. Through a com-

bination of sign language and pidgin French, I managed to make him understand that I needed to check my luggage. First things first. There was no way I could venture out of that station, looking for Intourist or a hotel until I got rid of those bags, which together weighed at least 200 pounds. He pointed me towards aisles of lockers, maybe 40 feet away. No one offered to help carry my bags there. I advanced slowly, dragging one bag a few feet, depositing it and going back to retrieve the next. Finally, when I was an arm's length away from the closest locker, I realized I had no Russian coins. Another policeman approached. "What you doing?" he spoke some English.

"I'm trying to store my bags. Can you help me? I need to change some money."

"No. No put bags here. Not safe." He pointed to the opposite end of the huge hall where a number of groups of beggars sat and stood in clumps. "They steal. Take your bags to other place. I help." He picked up both of the large bags and headed towards the back of the hall. I shuffled behind him with two shoulder bags still weighing me down. Soon we arrived at what looked like a large cage with thick wire mesh from floor to ceiling. He yelled in Russian to the man behind the counter, who then opened the door to the cage, grabbed my bags and handed me a receipt. I turned to ask the cop for directions to Intourist, but he was gone. The man who guarded the baggage spoke no English. He did point me towards an information booth, where I finally got directions to the Intourist Office.

It was dark when I finally arrived there and very close to closing time. A clerk who was obviously anxious to go home for the day, glanced at my visa, scribbled the name of a nearby hotel on a scrap of paper and disappeared. There was a long line at the counter of the hotel—which from the outside looked like a miniature version of the Kremlin. I figured the hotel would be too expensive, but for one night, I could manage it. Finally, when it was my turn, I asked for their cheapest room. "Is it ok with you?" The clerk looked at me with contempt. "The shower and bath are in the basement, if you want the cheapest room."

I gave her an exhausted nod.

"Let me see your passport and visa." She was all business.

I obeyed. Like Ike, this clerk studied the visa for a long time and then

announced, "This visa is no good. I mean it expired. We cannot give you a room, if you don't have a valid visa."

"But I just came from Intourist and they sent me here," I nearly whined.

"I do not care who sent you here. We have rules. No visa, no room."

"But what can I do? Intourist is closed."

She shrugged.

"OK, I'll just stay in the lobby here until Intourist opens in the morning." I glanced at the overstuffed chairs and couches, and tried to figure out which one would be least uncomfortable as a bed for the night.

"Oh no, you cannot do that." She raised her voice a notch and glanced at the line growing behind me.

I still could not believe that she would reject my proposal. It seemed so reasonable.

"I won't cause any bother. I'll be quiet." I answered.

"Look, it is not allowed. No visa, no room. Leave or I will have to call the police.

Finally, I realized she would not be persuaded. "Well, what am I supposed to do? It's too cold to stay on a park bench all night?"

Then she suggested the unthinkable. "Go to your embassy."

"What?" Instead of logic, I decided to try politics and lowered my voice. "You know, I really can't go to my embassy. I've just been to Hanoi and Peking. They consider me an enemy. Please help me."

"Look. I don't care if you have been to the moon. The rules are the rules. Now leave here before I call the police."

Dismayed, I slowly moved away from the counter and stood in the hotel doorway, trying to decide what to do next. I watched the people of this strange city. Like New Yorkers, they all seemed to be rushing somewhere, pushing each other to get into crowded buses. Finally, I decided that if I had to choose between a Soviet prison and a US prison, I would choose the US prison, at least they would speak English there. I stepped to the curb and hailed a cab. In an instant, one stopped in front of me.

Yelling towards his barely-opened window I asked, "How much would you charge to take me to the US Embassy?" I could not believe I was saying this. I was about to throw myself at the monster feet of Secretary of State Henry Kissinger's non-existent mercy. The cab driver looked me up and down and demanded, "You pay in dollars or rubles?"

"Dollars. How many dollars to go to the Embassy?" It had been a very long time since I had any need to bargain with a cab driver. In both Viet Nam and China, I was a privileged guest, always pampered with a free chauffeur-driven car.

"That depends on how many dollars you have." He leered at me.

"Nevermind."

The next cab that stopped offered to take me to the Embassy for three dollars as long as I exchanged a twenty-dollar bill for rubles with him. He would give me a very good rate of exchange. In minutes, I was facing a high iron gate. The Embassy was closed for the night, but a young Marine came to the gate to see who was ringing the bell. He was the first American stranger I had seen in months. Tall, blond, blue-eyed, with a southern accent.

I told him that I worked for the *Guardian* newspaper in New York and was expecting them to wire me money in the morning. In the meantime, I needed a place to stay. I never mentioned Hanoi or Peking and he didn't press me—however implausible my story was. He was a southern gentleman whose instincts told him to help this poor white woman in distress. He gave me a pillow, some sheets and a blanket so I would be comfortable on the couch of the office. In the morning, he brought me a bowl of cornflakes and a cup of instant coffee. I asked him if he had a map of Moscow he could spare. He did. I thanked him profusely and set off for Intourist.

Before I boarded the train to Finland Station ten days later, I toured Moscow and sought out English-speaking students at Patrice Lumumba University (PLU). I spent my final days in the "East" at PLU with some Ethiopian engineering students who bombarded me with stories of the racism they endured in Moscow.

Paris Family Reunion (1974)

For most of the twenty-hour train ride from Stockholm to Paris I slept. Hung met me outside the Gare du Nord. She was short, with jet black hair, which she probably dyed, since she was at least sixty-five years old. Her body and mind, in perpetual motion, left her thin, even by Vietnamese standards. We hugged and kissed the air first to the right of our right ears, and then to the left of our left ears, French style. Then we hugged again, hard, and she exclaimed with a broad smile.

"I'm so glad you're back. I'm going to exploit you even more mercilessly than before."

"You mean you haven't finished all the translations without me?" I teased her. After months of arrivals in strange cities, it felt marvelous to not only return to a familiar city, but also to have a friend and work waiting for me—work that might be useful to the Vietnamese.

She laughed and helped me load my bags into her tiny, ancient Peugeot, then expertly steered into the stream of traffic heading towards our home in the 11th Arrondissement. The car rattled angrily at every crease in the road. The noise and traffic drowned out my answers to her barrage of questions: "How was it? Did you love Hanoi? Did you have a chance to visit the street I used to live on? Who did you talk to at the Foreign Languages Publishing House?"

Hung belonged to the huge Vietnamese expat community in Paris. She supported herself as a pharmacist but devoted all her available time to translating Vietnamese into French. She worked on a steady stream of publications issued by the Foreign Languages Publishing House in Ha-

noi. Shortly before I left San Francisco, I had met a young Vietnamese mathematician, Lê Dũng Tráng, a wunderkind invited to Berkeley as a guest lecturer. I had served as his San Francisco guide, and he gave me his mother's address in Paris—which was one floor below his unused apartment.

"You'll love my mother," Tráng had assured me. "And, like me, she'll insist that you stay in my apartment for as long as you need a place in Paris."

That's how I met Hung and ended up having my own apartment on the top floor of 16 Boulevard Jules Ferry, a short two-block walk from the Metro at Republique. From there, I loved to stare out the window at the rooftops that stretched for blocks. The slate tiles, the gabled roofs, the planters all fascinated me. Gazing at that ocean of sculpted roofs calmed me—briefly silencing the question that gnawed at me: how I could meet all the obligations I felt towards working to end the war and strengthening our anti-imperialist women's movement.

On the first morning after I returned to Paris, I opened the door to Hung's knock. "I bought you some breakfast. It's to give you energy to work." Then she winked. And for an hour, before she left for the pharmacy, we sipped espresso, a huge cup of hot milk, and nibbled on warm croissants as we debated how to polish her translation from French to English. She spoke French fluently, but English only haltingly and her written English was barely literate. Yet she challenged each departure I made from her literal translations. Hung and her comrades were eager to hear my reports from Viet Nam. If I hadn't suggested that meeting with the Latin American women would also build solidarity with Viet Nam, Hung and contacts from the Women's Union in Hanoi might have insisted on monopolizing all my time in Paris.

The day after I settled into the apartment on Jules Ferry, I called my friend Elisabeth. Elisabeth Burgos, a Venezuelan activist and anthropologist, then famous for having been married to Regis Debray, the French Marxist who had interviewed Che Guevara in Bolivia. Debray wrote *Revolution within a Revolution*, briefly considered the canon on armed struggle.

I knew and loved Elisabeth as a brilliant anti-imperialist, the hub of a

network of Marxist feminist intellectuals and activists in Paris, especially Latin American women in exile. I had met her a year earlier when she arrived in San Francisco with plans to study in Berkeley. Before she found her own place, she stayed in our San Francisco women's collective house. Our friendship grew during the hours and hours we spent, sweating in Finnila's Finnish Bath, exploring each other's ideas on women's liberation in the Third World context and our revolutionary visions for that era after Che's death.

When I returned to Paris, we arranged to meet at a Metro station, "the way all Parisians do," she quipped. "And then we'll find a café where we can talk." Elisabeth, short and lithe, with the body of a gymnast, had jet black hair, bronze skin from her Indigenous ancestors, and piercing ebony eyes. At this meeting, she seemed preoccupied and smaller than I remembered her.

Once we were settled into a table, I reached for her hand. "Elisabeth, are you okay?"

"I'm ok, but I'm immersed in this international campaign to free Carmen Castillo and the other sister comrades in the clutches of the dictatorships of Chile and Brazil."

I nodded, took a sip of espresso and scanned the café, vaguely concerned that Elisabeth may have been followed by the secret police of the Pinochet dictatorship (DINA) or CIA. The women I met in Hanoi who had been tortured might as well have encircled that café table and tapped me on the shoulder. They expected me to do something. "Elisabeth. Sign me up. Put me to work."

"Well, we're having a women's forum to expose the torture of women political prisoners in Chile and Brazil. Could you talk about women political prisoners in Viet Nam?"

"In French? You know I couldn't do it in French."

"Of course not. You can do it in English. I can translate. Don't worry about it. Just speak from your heart."

"Of course." I sighed, happy to do something, however inadequate.

Elisabeth had more plans for me. Four days after I reached Paris, I was on the train again, this time headed for Germany. In the second-class

compartment, I joined Sonia, Danda, and Norma—all Brazilian women. We were traveling to Frankfurt for the weekend where an International Women's Congress was convening to plan for the main United Nations International Women's Year Conference which was slated for Mexico City the following year. The Brazilian women—especially Sonia who had survived torture by Brazil's security police and recently was forced into exile—hoped to get the Frankfurt Congress to take action to free the remaining women prisoners in Brazil. They warmly welcomed me into their circle as a comrade who shared their commitment to freeing political prisoners. Many of the feminists from Paris hardly spoke to us on the train. Their only interest was their struggle against French "phallocrats."

On the train, Sonia squeezed into the seat next to me, pushing my pile of notebooks away. She was tall, lean, with an olive complexion and hair dyed blond. Perhaps she had been beautiful once, but when I met Sonia, her eyes—permanently distant—were sunk deep into dark gray circles that seemed to occupy most of her face. As the train pulled out of the station, she grabbed my arm, and in Portuguese-accented English pressed me.

"Can you help me? Elisabeth told me you wrote about the torture of Vietnamese women. I need to tell my story, but it's hard. I can't do it by myself."

I had planned to use the time on the train to prepare my speech for the Conference, but that could wait. "You mean to speak at the Conference?"

Sonia moaned as if an old chronic ache reappeared and whispered. "No, I cannot talk to large groups. Norma, you know Norma Bengell, my roommate." She pointed to Norma who was leaning on Danda. Both women were asleep in the seats facing us in the train compartment. "She's an actress and she helped me make a small film that I will show at the Conference."

I was about to ask her what part of her story wasn't in the film when she pressed her hand hard on the flat space in the middle of my chest above my breasts.

"Please. Listen. I will tell you what I can." She removed her hand from my chest and used it to make a fist around my hand. I nodded and put my other hand over hers.

"I was a university student before I was arrested." She paused, straining to remember her life before her capture. "I was dedicated to the struggle, but we lived like most students: we studied, we did our political work, we went to the movies. I had a fiancé." Tears ran down her cheeks as she sobbed silently. I gently withdrew my hand and rummaged in my bag for a tissue.

"I'm sorry." She murmured.

I handed her a tissue. "Please, there's nothing to apologize for. You don't need to relive any horrors for me."

She inhaled and sighed. "No, I have more I must say. You know, they tore off all my clothes and tied me down on a table. They played music with a violent beat, very loud. And they laughed, like they were at a party. Barbarians!" She began spitting out her words, fast.

I had the urge to stop her. I didn't know if I could bear hearing what came next. But some instinct told me that she needed to relive and exorcise her ordeal. It was my duty to listen.

"At first, they didn't ask me any questions. They just wanted to humiliate me, to soften me up. During that first time in the torture chamber, they beat me, they spit on me and told me I was a commie whore who would get what I deserved." Her anger seemed to drain, and she began to speak matter-of-factly and with a fixed smile. I had seen that smile on the face of, Mý, the Vietnamese woman I met in Hanoi who had been tortured. Unlike Sonia, in Hanoi, she had been surrounded by her sisters in the Women's Union. I wished I could summon that same support for Sonia.

"Back in the cell, I could hear the screams and curses of other *companheiras*. I vowed I would die before I would give them one name. The next time, they stripped me again and asked me if I was ready to 'be nice.' I just stood there with my lips squeezed together and my hands over my private parts. Suddenly, they grabbed me, they strapped me down on the table in a way that forced my spine to arch until I felt my back would break. They pried my legs apart and tied each ankle to a table leg. They inserted a wire into my vagina and attached other wires to my nipples and ears. The pain was excruciating. The shocks lasted until I lost consciousness."

Sonia still smiled. Her rigid smile frightened me.

"You know, when I blacked out, I gained the advantage. The pain stopped. They know this so they injected stimulants into some of the comrades to keep them awake, but not me. When I regained consciousness, I lay in a heap on the floor of the cell. All my muscles were in spasm, like I was an epileptic. I couldn't lift myself off the floor. I couldn't tell if the screams I heard were mine or someone else's."

Sonia paused. She was trembling. My arm had almost reached her opposite shoulder when she jerked towards me and hugged me fiercely. At that moment a conductor came through to check our tickets. I had never before so much welcomed an official's interruption. She had transported me to that dungeon. My own arms and neck felt cramped and hot. I needed to stretch. Gratefully, I stood to find the ticket in my coat pocket.

"You know, the Brazilian dictatorship receives more money and military aid from the United States than any other country in Latin America," she declared in the voice of a non-partisan newscaster. Perhaps she made this announcement for the benefit of the conductor or perhaps she too needed a break.

"Yes, I know." I jumped at the chance to talk about strategy. "Hopefully, we can get the UN Women's Conference to take a stand against Brazil and US support for all dictatorships." She kissed me on the cheek. "That's the key. The junta will crumble without US backing." Then she slapped me playfully on the thigh. "Now, you better get back to work on your speech about our sisters in Viet Nam. We'll be in Frankfurt soon."

In Frankfurt, at the Conference, we emerged as a well-practiced tag team. Despite their inclination to ignore the oppression of women in Africa, Latin American and Asia, the European women could not maintain their indifference after they saw Sonia's film that documented her harrowing experience; shook her scarred hand and heard my reports about political prisoners in the Vietnamese dungeons, paid for by the US. We laughed and hugged often on the train returning to Paris, armed with copies of the Resolution we had written that would now become part of the record going into the upcoming official UN Conference in Mexico City. The Resolution read:

The International Women's Congress.... Supports the struggles of women in Asia, Africa and Latin America against sexism, racism and imperialism and defends their right to define and organize their own struggles. We support the demands of the Vietnamese women.... We support the struggles of Latin American women and demand the end to the rape and torture of women imprisoned in Chile and Brazil and other fascist dictatorships...

We were proud of the Resolution—especially because it didn't pander to many of the European women who, like many white women in the US, made a narrow focus on sexism a condition for their support. We had demonstrated to the European women, who thought they had a "higher consciousness," that women from Latin America, Africa and Asia would lead themselves. And, more basically, women's solidarity meant that when European women followed the lead of Third World Women, all women would be closer to their liberation.

Back in Paris, the Resolution became part of the presentation I made to various French feminist and Vietnamese groups. Although most UN Conferences had been dominated by the US government, we were about to challenge that.

Whether I was riding on the Metro from one meeting to the next or staring out over the rooftops in the 11th Arrondissement, Bu Thi Me's words echoed: "We are part of the worldwide family of militant women..." The Vietnamese represented one branch of that family, and, in Paris, two other branches joined the reunion: the Latin American women and a pair of us from the United States: me and Kathleen Cleaver.

I had first met Kathleen sometime in early 1968, at the Black Panther Party's headquarters in Oakland, "The Ministry of Information," when the staff of *The Movement* newspaper shared typesetting equipment with the Panthers. At the time, Eldridge Cleaver was the Party's Minister of Information and Kathleen was Secretary of Communications. Eldridge's charisma, fiery speeches, brilliant slogans and manic drive to prove himself the most militant revolutionary "mutha" brought him fame, many groupies and constant police harassment. I thought Kathleen's speeches and writings easily matched his, plus I saw her follow through with conscientious organizing. Throughout that frenzied time when J. Edgar

Hoover had declared war on the Panthers, Kathleen provided passionate and steady leadership. I listened in awe to her speak at a rally on the Berkeley Campus.

Everybody knows all the people don't have liberties. All the people don't have freedom. All the people don't have justice. All people don't have power. So that means none of us do. The Black Panther Party provides leadership to the people's revolution so we can take this country and change it, turn it upside down. Put the last first and the first last—not only for Black people but for all people.

Without any self-consciousness, along with her, I raised my fist and yelled as loud as I could, "All power to the people!" She, like most Panthers in 1968, had seen friends and comrades arrested, beaten and killed by the police. They worked and lived with urgency and intensity fueled by an understanding that they might die at any time and by the certainty that their round-the-clock struggles would change history. In those embattled times, some Panthers gave white supporters the sense that our only role was to donate money. Not Kathleen. For years after that rally, I quoted her to explain the meaning of solidarity in the clearest, most basic terms.

She was only 23 when the Cleaver home, an ancient Victorian mansion in the old Fillmore District of San Francisco, became the Westbay headquarters of the Party. I had gone to their house to interview her for *The Movement.* She showed me into an ornate Victorian parlor. She was tall and lean, with a huge brown Afro, light gray eyes and skin lighter than mine. "Welcome to the Black Panther Party headquarters in San Francisco." A diplomat's warmth and poise replaced the staccato of her speechmaker's voice. "I'm sorry, an emergency has come up. I won't be able to do the interview now. But I promise we'll find another time. Meanwhile, help yourself to tea while I find you some literature. That way your trip here won't be a total waste." She pointed to a thermos, surrounded by several paper cups. The scene reminded me of visits I had made in Cuba to foreign embassies.

Six years later, she, Eldridge, and their two kids were living in exile in Paris. When I first called her from Tráng's apartment, she didn't recognize my name. "Arlene, Arlene Eisen, you said. How do I know you?" Her question was open, not suspicious.

FRANKFURT, Germany, November 1974. At the feminist women's preparatory conference for UN International Women's Year in Mexico City, Sonia is kneeling with movie camera, Norma Bengell is standing second from left.

FRANKFURT, Germany, November 1974. At the feminist women's preparatory conference for UN International Women's Year, Arlene promoted a resolution in solidarity with women political prisoners in Thieu's South Vietnamese prisons and tiger cages.

"I'm from San Francisco. I used to be editor of *The Movement* newspaper. Remember *The Movement* newspaper? We used to typeset it at the Ministry?" After all she had been through—traveling throughout the US to raise money and support for Panthers in prison, having her home raided and countless friends murdered, exile in Algeria and now Paris—why should she remember me, another white leftist supporter in a crowd of thousands?

"Yes, of course, now I remember. You're the sister with the long brown hair and big boobs. You wrote some wonderful articles about the Party. What are you doing in Paris?"

I explained and she invited me to visit at their apartment. "I'm sorry I can't meet you somewhere more convenient, but I have no one to watch Maceo and Joju." At the time, Maceo was five and his sister, Joju, was a year younger.

After a Metro ride that required more transfers than I was used to, I found Kathleen's apartment in a run-down building far from the center of Paris. While in Algiers, she and Eldridge had established the International Section of the Black Panther Party. For a brief time, representatives of every revolutionary government and liberation movement in the world treated the International Section as if it were the seat of the new liberated Black Nation in exile. She learned first hand about the complicated relations between Cuba, Algeria, China, the Soviet Union, North Korea and various African nations and liberation movements south of the Sahara. Yet, for more than a year, she had been relatively isolated in this apartment that was too small for her, Eldridge and their two young kids. Given their tenuous legal status, she kept a low profile.

She devoured the news I brought from Viet Nam, China, and my Trans Siberian odyssey. I relished the chance to sort out my confusions over the Sino-Soviet split with another woman whose political priority was also to support national liberation movements, the movements that we still thought, with confidence, would defeat US imperialism. Yet our animated political debate about the dangers of Soviet domination was wedged between the demands of Maceo and Joju.

The following day, with the kids in tow, Kathleen came with me to an appointment at *Des Femmes* bookstore—a new women's bookstore

that also doubled as a publishing house and meeting center. Kathleen had offered to help promote a French translation of my book by assuring them how relevant it was to women around the world. The woman at the bookstore shook Kathleen's hand and immediately launched into a critique of the Black Panther "phallocrats."

Kathleen responded, "But, sister, where have you gotten news about the Black Panthers?" Ever the gracious diplomat, Kathleen's voice didn't challenge or sound defensive.

The French feminist answered. "Uhm. I don't know. Probably *Liberacion* or *Le Monde*. But everyone knows about the Black Panthers' macho posturing."

Kathleen nodded and calmly explained. "I understand why you started a separate publishing house for women. Men control the newspapers and publishing industry in France, just like in the US, no?"

Des Femmes nodded.

Kathleen continued, "So you'll understand that it's men who decided what to print about the Panthers, what photos to publish—and many of those men just printed what they found exciting or what the CIA directed them to print. It was a way of keeping people ignorant of the serious revolutionary critique we were making."

Des Femmes wasn't about to give up so easily. "But how could you work for such a male-dominated organization?"

Kathleen's patience amazed me. She stated evenly, but proudly. "I joined because the Party talked about power. Black power. Not male power. We need Black power to get rid of racism, militarism, capitalism and sexism. We are a colonized people. Like the Vietnamese were colonized by the French. Have you asked a Vietnamese woman why she fought against France?"

After a longish pause, "I see your point." *Des Femmes* finally conceded without a smile.

Kathleen continued, "And speaking of Vietnamese women, my sister here says you may be interested in translating her book into French."

"Yes. Yes. We are very interested. We have even lined up a translator."

"Oh really. That's very good." I interjected. "I don't mean to be impatient, but I would like to settle this before I return to the States. How soon do you think the translation will be done? How many copies would you print?"

"Just tell us your terms and we'll put them in a contract."

"Great. Let me think about it. Can we meet again in a couple of days?"

"Of course."

Kathleen was rounding up her kids while me and *Des Femmes* kissed goodbye, lips past one ear, then the other.

As Kathleen and I walked towards the Metro, her arm looped through mine, she quipped, "No one ever asks me why men join the revolution."

I chuckled. "I don't know where you get your patience with these people."

"Neither do I. But seriously. Between our contacts at *Editions du Seuil, Maspero,* and *Le Monde Diplomatique* either Elisabeth or I could help you get your book published somewhere bigger than *Des Femmes*."

We were standing at the entrance to her Metro line. "Hey, are you hungry? There's a Vietnamese restaurant over there that looks good." Since returning to Paris I was obsessed with finding a restaurant that served food as good as I had savored in Viet Nam.

"Can't. Gotta get home. Maybe next time. But think about *Maspero*." We hugged and she grabbed the hand of each kid as they disappeared into the well of the Metro station.

The access to the mainstream media that leftists enjoyed in France awed and seduced me. If I could get my book published by the French equivalent to Random House, why should I sign with a small alternative press? In the end, the dazzle of *Du Seuil, Maspero* and the others dimmed. While I was waiting for them to return my calls, the *Des Femmes'* translator had already begun work. The night I signed a contract with Éditions des Femmes, I celebrated by going alone to the movies. One documentary, "L'Heure de la liberation a sonne" paid tribute to the role of women in

the liberation struggle against the sultan of Oman. In the lobby, I bought a huge color photograph of a row of unveiled, smiling women—members of the Peoples' Liberation Front of Oman—all in military uniform, raising their Kalashnikov rifles high over their heads. The opening of the other film, a documentary about a strike staged by Pakistani workers in France amazed me. The film started with a quote from George Jackson. Once again, I felt like I was part of a worldwide movement that could not be stopped.

Jane Fonda was in town. She called me first thing in the morning. Elisabeth must have given her my phone number. She was in Paris only briefly to speak at an anti-war conference.

"Arlene, is that you? I'm sorry we seem to be traveling in different directions. But at least we can talk on the phone. The Vietnamese were very pleased with your visit and Elisabeth told me that in Paris and Frankfurt you were a 'firebrand' for the Vietnamese women. I hope you'll work with us when you return to the States."

I was flattered but also suspicious. She had encouraged me to write the book and implied she would help with the publishing costs, but never did. My answer came cautiously. "Firebrand? Me? Elisabeth is exaggerating. In any case, what work are you talking about?"

"Indochina Focal Point, of course. You must come to Santa Monica and work on the campaign."

"Jane, I have a really long list of things I've already committed to do in New York and San Francisco. Once the dust settles a bit, I really want to go to LA to speak at the Women's Center and would be happy to speak, and show the revised Vietnamese Women's slide show wherever you suggest. But I don't know about working directly for the Campaign." Armed with the advice of my Vietnamese comrades about working with everyone, I bit my tongue, rather than tell her I disagreed with her and Tom's plans to join the Democratic Party.

"I see. Well, I must go now. Don't be a stranger, Arlene. Stay in touch. Yes, and please visit us again in Santa Monica when you have time."

"Yes, that would be good."

In a few minutes, I was standing on the Metro platform, headed to the Left Bank to meet Iona, the woman who was translating my book into French. Over a breakfast of croissants and cappuccinos we tried to reach consensus on the translation process. It became clear after just a few sips of coffee that she had little political experience and virtually no understanding of how the Vietnamese women's struggles related to her own. Nevertheless, she was an experienced translator and promised to consult with me if she had trouble understanding any of my concepts or terms. I could only hope she wouldn't impose her liberal views on the text. That conversation ended without resolution, with me rushing off to the Metro.

Kathleen and I had agreed to meet at a Vietnamese bookstore. It had the largest collection of publications from Hanoi available outside of Viet Nam. As we strolled up and down the aisles, I urged her to return to the States. "We need you there."

"But I can study here in Paris."

"You can study in the States too. Times have changed. They'll give you a scholarship."

"I don't know. I'm not ready."

Out of respect for her, I didn't press her to explain what she wasn't ready for. I wondered, was it that she wasn't ready to leave Eldridge or she wasn't ready to re-enter the US political scene where the police and COINTELPRO-inspired internecine struggles had devoured the Panther Party? She reached for a copy of Lin Biao's "Long Live the Victory of People's War." We had been having an on-going discussion on the ups and downs of China's foreign policy and its effect on national liberation struggles. Kathleen was one of the few women I knew who, like me, enjoyed keeping abreast of international trends, their political and theoretical implications. Our discussions made me feel all the excitement of an intellectual challenge without any of the discomfort I often felt in discussions with competitive men—usually more interested in defending their egos than in exploring ideas. Our meeting ended too soon. She needed to get home to pick her kids up from childcare and I was already late for my next meeting.

"Write to me," I pleaded. "I need you to keep tabs on the translator's progress. And the Maoists." I chuckled.

"Take care of yourself." Kathleen passed me a small white paper bag. "These are some medicinal herbs to keep up your strength. My farewell present."

We hugged and I waited with her until her train pulled into the station, even though mine was on another platform and I was late for my meeting with Elia, a Mexican student, living in Paris, who I had met at the Frankfurt Conference. Then Delfine, Danda and some of the other women who were part of our Frankfurt women's caucus treated me to a farewell meal at a restaurant they claimed had the best Vietnamese food outside Viet Nam. Finally, I was on the Metro again, headed to the tiny studio apartment where Norma and Sonia lived.

From their window on the third floor, Norma waved and dropped a key in my direction. The immigrants in this building, mostly Arabs, didn't have the power to press the landlord to hire a concierge or to install an elevator. I was breathing heavily, as I arrived at the third floor landing. Norma threw open her door, rushed to hug me, relieved me of my heavy bag and led me by the hand through the door. Music filled the small room.

"Voulez-vous coucher avec moi, ce soir?" The words were French but the beat was unmistakably Soul. I was confused. "Is that a French group?"

"Voulez-vous coucher avec moi, ce soir?"

Sonia shimmied at the stove as she mixed a large pot of black beans, and chuckled.

"Gitchi, gitchi ya ya da da

Mocca Chocolata ya ya

Creole Lady Marmalade."

Waving the wooden spoon to the beat, she crossed the room in three steps, pecked me on the lips and smiled. "What kind of American are you? Don't you know Labelle?"

"Um. Yeah, I've heard her. But not that song. Is it new?"

Norma handed me the album cover and a glass of scotch.

"Hey sister, go sister, soul sister, go sister."

I loved the music and the proud women's lyrics. "Oh, I see why I didn't recognize it. I was in Viet Nam when it came out.

"No matter." Sonia interjected. "Welcome to our home away from home." Still holding the wooden spoon, she used it as a pointer, as if she were surveying several acres—although the sink, stove and small refrigerator on one wall, the convertible couch-bed, a small table and three chairs, a small bookshelf with the record player perched on top all cluttered the room.

"Thank you. It's wonderful to be here." I meant it. I had enormous respect and admiration for Sonia and Norma as women who had sacrificed everything to fight the dictatorship in Brazil. Their intimacy—palpable women's solidarity—the music, dance, black beans and rice that sustained them—all inspired me. I glanced at a poster on the wall. I recognized the portrait of the Brazilian Black man. It was Carlos Marighella, the Brazilian author of *The Mini-manual of the Urban Guerrilla.* He and a white man each held their automatic weapons high in a victory pose. "Who's the comrade with Marighella?" I asked.

Sonia and Norma answered in unison. "Carlos LaMarca," the leader of the VPR (Popular Revolutionary Vanguard) which later became the MR8 (October 8th Revolutionary Movement)." Then Norma asked, "So you've heard of Marighella?"

I nodded. "Yes. I read his book." I remembered that it had not seemed very relevant.

"Many years ago—before the army killed him, before I had to flee Brazil, I was friends with Marighella. I told him then and I tell you now—the book was awful. He wrote it towards the end, during a very desperate time," Norma announced as she passed me the joint. For the first time in almost five months, I felt like I was home in our women's collective house.

"Oh." I was awed. Norma Bengell—a cross between Melina Mercouri and Diana Ross, was famous for winning the Golden Palm Award at Cannes and an Academy Award nomination—had been friends with a man who had been known as the Brazilian Che Guevara. Now she trust-

ed me enough to share both her uncensored opinions and a joint with me. I was about to ask more about what the icon of urban guerrilla warfare was like and why he was desperate, when Sonia interrupted.

"Norma, remember, she came here to talk about what we women did in the struggle—not those men, no matter. Let's eat first." The table was too small for serving platters. She handed me and Norma each a bowl and motioned for us to help ourselves from the pots on the stove. I had just eaten with the other women, but didn't want to seem impolite. Besides, the aroma of the black beans flavored with bacon, sausage, garlic and mustard was irresistible.

Norma inhaled the steam from her bowl and gave Sonia an appreciative kiss on the cheek. "I love black beans—from my country." In her raspy voice—she pronounced it "cuhntry."

Sonia held a bottle of white wine in one hand, and red in the other. "Which shall we have?" Norma pointed to the red. Sonia looked at me, waiting for my choice.

"Red's good."

Norma reached behind her to the phonograph and flipped the record. Sonia motioned to her to turn down the volume.

"You know, we were so happy to meet you going to that Conference in Frankfurt. Most of the European women..." Sonia paused, looked at Norma, searching for the word she wanted.

"...are not so serious about their politics," Norma offered. "Rather bourgeois." Sonia nodded. "Yes, but you are a fine worker for the Vietnamese women. We like that. We trust you. Viet Nam will win soon. When they do, you must come work for Latin American women."

My mind, lubricated by their praise, raced. Again, as in Viet Nam, I felt like a fraud. I did so little. I had done even less to challenge the military dictatorships in Latin America. Sure, like many leftists in the US, I had chanted at rallies against US support for the coup in Chile and military aid to the regime in Brazil—but those were just symbolic gestures. How could I tell Sonia—who had survived torture—and Norma—who had given up a movie-star career—that I could not commit to anything. I talked about building an anti-imperialist women's movement, but back

in the States, we still wrestled with how to take the first steps. I loved connecting with these women and relished the thought of working more closely with them. I ended up answering more confidently than I felt. "I'm honored and I don't deserve your praise. Besides, our movement is new and small and we still struggle about our strategy. I hate to say it, but it's true. I cannot commit to anything except to share with my compañeras what I learn from you."

Norma raised her glass. "That's good enough. Let's drink to that."

I took two quick swallows of wine and added, "I think, if women in the States—especially the ones I work with—know more about your struggles, they will be moved. Now, they have the impression that the movements in Brazil and other Latin American countries are very male dominated."

Sonia and Norma both chuckled and again declared, almost in unison. "They are."

I wanted to grab back my words. Stupid, arrogant—like the bourgeois European women who only wanted to support comfortable feminists like themselves, like the woman who interrogated Kathleen. "I'm sorry. We respect all women's right to define their own struggles."

I was about to elaborate but Sonia interjected. "No need to apologize. We want you to know more about women's role in the struggle against the dictatorship, even in the armed struggle." Sonia frowned and paused. She looked like she might cry. Norma reached over her bowl of rice and beans, put her arm around her shoulders, kissed her cheek gently and murmured something in Portuguese. I heard a word that sounded like "courage."

Sonia continued. "In 1968, there was no way to struggle legally against the dictatorship—either you joined the clandestine, armed struggle or you accepted the status quo. It's true, 90% of the comrades were men. I told you before, most of the women who joined were like me, university students. While many of us were lovers of the men, we were not housewives, we were independent. Those of us who learned to use arms were treated as equals, as comrades. Have you heard of Yara Yavelberg?"

I shook my head, and whispered, "no, I'm sorry."

"She was the *companhiera* of Carlos. Carlos LaMarca, our leader. But she was a militant in her own right. Fierce. In 1971, she and LaMarca fled to Bahia. She was only 28, when she shot herself rather than allow the military to capture her alive. She was a psychologist and if she had lived, she would have made a strong contribution to understanding women's psychology. And she was my good friend." The record finished playing. No one moved to put a new one on.

Norma poked me. "And she came from a Jewish family."

I blushed and reached for Sonia's arm. "You were captured around the same time, weren't you?"

Sonia nodded and looked down.

"I'm sorry to ask this, and if it's too hard to talk about it, please don't. But I think a lot of women—and people in general—could learn from your experience. Where did you get the strength to defy the torturers?"

Sonia's eyes no longer met ours. She was looking backward, deep into her pain. Then, like on the train, her words came in a rush.

"We had a clear analysis of the situation. If I talked, 30, 40, maybe 50 sympathizers would get hurt or killed. If I died, it would be better. I didn't think my life was more important than 50 others. I was sure we were correct. I had no dudas. I joined the movement because I was sure it was the only way for us to live like humans. Life, to me, was not worth living if I couldn't fight. People who joined the movement for personal status, they were the ones who talked."

Sonia stopped and looked up, out the window. I used the pause to catch up on my notes. Norma put her arm around Sonia again and declared, "Me, I always hate the dictatorship. And I love the guerrillas, but, before the generals forced me to leave, I never thought armed struggle would work."

Sonia smiled. Finished with her personal memories, she spoke more confidently.

"Regis (Debray) for us was a god. But in 1969, we looked around and saw a lot of people getting killed. So we began to read him again and criticize him. Damn Debray's foco theory. Fidel was very smart for Cuba, but Brazil is different. And I'm not even sure Debray understood Fidel. A revolution takes time and has stages. We must be with the people at every stage. I hate when people assume that now that I am older, more mature, I have changed. I am still a revolutionary. Just not a vanguardist. I'm not pessimistic, al contrario, I believe in the people."

I had read what Frantz Fanon and Carlos Marighella had written about torture, and heard Vietnamese women report on their torture. But Sonia, a woman who I had danced and shared a joint with, was the first torture survivor I identified with. I felt awed by her and so the impulse to protect her confused me. There was no arguing with her experience that so emphatically rejected the same foco theory that still influenced some people in the US movement, including my comrades in the Weather Underground and people we had tried to support in the Black Liberation Army.

Norma interrupted my musing. "Me too. I believe in the Brazilian people. I will return to our country soon. I don't think they will torture me. I'm too well-known. Before I leave, I will shout to everyone that I am leaving. So everyone will know what happened if I disappear. But enough of politics. We must celebrate on your last night in Paris, Arlene."

Sonia's story so absorbed me, I had forgotten that I was leaving early the next day. "I gotta go soon, I still haven't packed."

"No way. We will not allow you to leave so soon." Sonia passed me a joint, while Norma put on some music. It reminded me of the African drumming I had heard at Cuban Santería rituals. "Ilei Aye." Norma announced. "Let's dance."

There was really no space to dance—but I stood with them, watching how they moved their hips, shook their shoulders and joined them.

In the days before leaving Europe, late into the night, I lay in bed composing lists and lists of the groups and people I needed to report to, articles I needed to write, organizations I would try to prod into renewed solidarity action. Fears that the US Customs and Immigration police would confiscate my precious journals and address book, and even arrest me for "giving comfort to the enemy" also gnawed at me. The risk of arrest was remote, but not impossible.

I decided to return via Montreal and took the precaution of not contacting friends there in advance. Canadian immigration waved me through along with the other North Americans and an airport shuttle deposited me in front of a Montreal Hotel. I used the phone in the lobby to call Quy, the leader of a group of Vietnamese exiles who were barred from returning to their homes in US-occupied Saigon.

While Quy prepared a wonderful meal of Vietnamese spring rolls and phõ, his wife, Sarah, and I kept him company. Two Vietnamese women and another man arrived for dinner. They were planning a conference about Vietnamese women and hoped I could speak there. They peppered me with questions about the Viet Nam Women's Union and told me that they had read about my visit there in the Vietnamese press. From them, I learned that the press in Hanoi had been criticizing bureaucracy. Then the conversation turned to strategy for mobilizing support for the Vietnamese in the final stages of the war. They were sure victory was imminent. Finally, around 11PM, Quy and Sarah offered to drive me into Vermont.

The three of us and my luggage crammed into their small Volkswagen. Quy drove, Sarah sat in the front next to him. "You, try to sleep in the back." Sarah advised. "You may have to wait a while in Burlington for the bus to take you to New York." Instead of sleeping, I pressed them for their opinion of China's waning solidarity with Viet Nam.

I was so involved in our conversation that my stomach never had a chance to churn as we approached the border. The booth was closed. In an instant, after traveling to Hanoi, Peking and Moscow—I was back on

US soil and no US official had even glanced at my passport. Sarah and Quy dropped me off at a donut shop across from the Greyhound Station.

Spring Victories (1975)

For nearly a decade, we had been chanting "Ho, Ho, Ho Chi Minh, NLF is gonna win." But in early January 1975, when the US-sponsored South Vietnamese Army fled from the Central Highland town of Phuoc Long, I barely noticed. Long before I had given up on keeping track of the distorted battlefield scorecards that the *New York Times* printed.

After the liberation of Phuoc Long, rumors circulated that the battle marked a turning point in the war. I didn't know what to believe. In the 10 years I had been demonstrating against the war, we built a labyrinth of turning points. Then, on January 27, 1975, the second anniversary of the signing of the Paris Peace Accords, I stood on the stage in Union Square facing a crowd of demonstrators organized by the Viet Nam Veterans Against the War (VVAW). We waited to begin the rally, hoping that more people would arrive.

"Damn," I whispered to Mike, tall, goodlooking, blond and muscular. He could have been the star of his high school football team and senior prom king. But after completing a harrowing tour of duty in Viet Nam, he joined VVAW and led their security team. That day, he stood a few feet from the microphone, scanning the audience and the shrubs behind us on the lookout for anyone who might pull the plug on the sound system or attack the stage.

"What's the matter, compañera? See something?"

"Oh. Nothing. At least no security problem. But we have a serious political problem. Where is everyone! Before the Paris Peace Accords,

it was easy to bring 25,000 people out for a rally like this. What's your crowd count today?"

Mike was an expert at crowd counts. "Maybe 1,200, probably closer to 1,000."

"See what I mean." I held my hand over the microphone. "People think there's nothing to demonstrate for anymore." I tried to avoid thinking about the women I met in Viet Nam and how, at the end of each gut-wrenching meeting, I repeated, "When I return, I will work for the enforcement of the Peace Agreement and end aid to the Thieu Regime. Your victories are our victories." I was letting them down.

"Hey, Arlene, we better start, or we'll get too far behind schedule." He motioned to Nguyen Van Luy, an elder in the Vietnamese exile community, to take the mic.

"Friends," Van Luy began. "I have good news. You won't read about it in the *New York Times*, but the People's Campaign to liberate the Central Highlands has begun. Victory is certain..." Van Luy, a founder of the Union of Vietnamese Patriots in the US, had worked as a spy for the United States against the Japanese during World War II. He, like Ho Chi Minh, had admired the US, but when the US sided with the French against the Vietnamese independence movement, he felt betrayed. He was a stalwart in the US anti-war movement, and a rather plodding speaker who often read a tedious list of news items he had found in the Vietnamese press. On that day, no one could mistake a new excitement in his message.

When he finished, before handing me the mic, he hugged me and whispered. "It's true, mark my words, the People's Liberation Army will soon march into Saigon." Then it was my turn to speak. Dressed in my Vietnamese peasant's loose black pants, blue work shirt and thin checkered scarf, I was glad the weather was unusually sunny and warm for January. The crowd was friendly, but my hand shook anyway as I held the mic. I never felt comfortable speaking from a platform, peering down at the audience from that perch. I much preferred sitting on the edge of a table, casually facing an audience or, even better, sitting in a chair—part of a circle. I glanced at the index card which listed the points I had planned to make. Van Luy and the VVAW speaker had

already covered that territory. I needed to say something people hadn't already heard. I wanted them to hear the urgent voices I had heard in Viet Nam speak personally to them. I cleared my throat. I thought of beginning a chant—but that felt too awkward. Finally, I heard myself say, in a conversational tone:

"It's good you're here. It means you know Ford continues to violate the Peace Accords. You may have heard—and you can see by my clothes—I just got back from Viet Nam." I grabbed the leg of those pants I was so proud to wear and did a mock pirouette. People chuckled with me.

I relaxed a bit and continued, "Frankly, it was hard to come back. I wanted to stay in Viet Nam, especially with the women who became my family in Hanoi. I even asked them if I could work there, translating, broadcasting, doing anything that would earn my keep. They refused. Gently, diplomatically, they told me: "You must go back home to share what you have learned here—we are certain when the American people know the truth, they will stop all support for Thieu. The sooner aid to Thieu stops, the sooner we will liberate Saigon.'"

I was so absorbed in memories of conversations with Vo Thi Thê, the applause that interrupted me, surprised me. I continued,

"Let me give you an example of how the continued violation of the Peace Accords affects people. It's been two years since they signed the Peace Accords which stipulated that all political prisoners held in the South by Thieu were supposed to be released immediately. Yet Thieu still keeps close to a quarter of a million in horrific tiger cages. I met one of the few who had been released. We were in a sitting room—in an old French colonial mansion, on a quiet, tree-lined street in Hanoi. The mansion had been converted into the headquarters of the Provisional Revolutionary Government of South Viet Nam. A former student, Mỹ, twenty-four years old when we met, had been imprisoned when she was nineteen. She walked with a limp. As she spoke, her troubled stare remained trapped, paralyzed in a terrifying memory. She took long pauses between her sentences. She seemed relieved that the translator gave her time to gather her energy for her next sentence."

I worried that I might have lost the audience. "Should I take time to read what she said?" I asked the crowd. "Read it! Read it!" I heard some

people yell. So, I took out a copy of a letter I had in my other pocket—a letter I had written to friends—that quoted from Mỷ.

"They beat me systematically on the joints so I would be unable to walk or be of any use to the struggle....I fainted many times. But I witnessed tortures worse than mine. A sister named Bảy, who is probably still in prison, had a live eel inserted in her vagina. Then they gave the eel electric shocks so the eel would move violently inside her, to destroy her...She was forty-five years old when I was released. I do not know if she still lives."

"As Mỷ began to describe another case, her voice drifted off. One of the other women in the room filled the silence, 'Her memory is not so good because of the torture. We asked her what she had been studying before she was arrested. She could not remember what she had been studying or what her plans had been.' Tears filled the eyes of the seven women in the circle. Mine streaked my cheeks. 'We only know she came from a peasant family.'

I saw some people in the audience were crying. I glanced at Mike, tapped my watch in a silent question, am I going on too long? He motioned me to continue.

"I also spent a few days in Quảng Trị—just south of the 17th parallel. I met an old woman there, who, like everyone else, lived in a thatched hut. Their sturdier homes had been demolished during US raids that dropped some 94 bombs per person on her village. Truong Thi Thiem told me she bore seven children, yet her stomach looked hard and flat beneath her worn white shirt and loose black pants. She was a full head shorter than me, with gray hair and only a few teeth, some black from lacquer, some brown from tea. She looked at least seventy years old, but told me she was fifty-two. During the famine of 1945, she ate only one bowl of rice every two days. 'The men used to beat us, gamble and drink. Now, they dare not—thanks to the revolution. 'These days, even though I am old and sick, I bring earth to the roadside, preparing piles to repair the damage the bombs do...if the enemy has the guts to come again, we'll be ready.' Her grin was mischievous."

Maybe the audience wanted to hear more, but I felt too drained to continue.

"I could go on—I have four journals filled with stories like Thiem's. I'm afraid that many movement people are no longer paying attention to Viet Nam—but, like Thiem, we gotta hang in there. The Vietnamese will defi-

nitely win—but, if we succeed in stopping all support for Thieu, stopping all the bombing, freeing the political prisoners, then victory will come that much sooner. People are fighting for their freedom all over the world—but Viet Nam is the place where the people are closest to victory against US imperialism—with a victory of such magnitude, the monster will not recover."

I liked the applause that came when I stopped speaking, but a sense that I was preaching to the choir haunted me. In the following weeks, I added to the growing pile of leaflets I kept on my desk. They announced, "Your victory is our victory—a program of women's lives and work in Viet Nam today." They gave details of my various speaking engagements: at St. Peter's Church in San Francisco, in Pauley Ballroom at UC Berkeley, Boalt Law School in Berkeley, at City College in San Francisco, San Francisco State, UC Santa Cruz and UCLA. I never used the same examples, but always raised the same issues.

I had piles of slides to show with my talks. The women in the audience often clapped or sighed or moaned in all the places I expected they might react. Nevertheless, after the question sessions and applause ended, I felt uneasy. I had become a political travel reporter, not the speaker that provoked outrage and action that I wanted to be. No matter how dramatic the accounts of suffering, no matter how inspiring the reports of women's courage, I didn't think I was bridging the ocean that separated women in San Francisco from women in Viet Nam. Even the women who identified with the Vietnamese struggle had shifted their focus to Chile, to Palestine and the economic crisis at home.

During this time I also followed up on a request of the Viet Nam Women's Union. They had been so impressed by the solidarity messages I brought from anti-imperialist women around the US, they asked me to organize a delegation of four of them to visit Viet Nam. I was honored by the request and felt responsible for ensuring the delegation included representation beyond my personal circle. I invited Toni Cade Bambara, who had published the first anthology of Black women's liberation writing, *The Black Woman*. The delegation also included white anti-imperialist feminists: Pam Costain, Donna Futterman and Laura Whitehorn. At an orientation meeting we held shortly before they travelled, we unanimously elected Toni as leader of the delegation.

I still had my job teaching at San José State and between teaching, writing articles and speaking about my trip, planning meetings and conferences, I barely had time to keep up with the news—even the news of the War. Then, Sara, the student who first insisted on my preparing a workshop about Vietnamese women, showed me an article on page one of the *New York Times*. The article was datelined, SAIGON, South Vietnam, Monday, March 10. It began, "North Vietnamese troops launched ground attacks early today against the usually placid Central Highlands provincial capital of Ban Me Thuot, assaulting its two airfields, an ammunition dump and other positions...."

I re-read the article. "Sara, this is it. I think this is the beginning of the end of the War. We should organize a teach-in, maybe a celebration."

Sara had become a thoughtful radical. "Maybe a celebration is a bit premature. No one has even heard of Ban Me Thuot. How do you know it's so important?"

"When I was in Quảng Trị, just south of the 17th parallel, a leader of the revolutionary government talked about the capital of the Central Highlands, Ban Me Thuot. I remember she had a twinkle in her eye when she said, 'Arlene, when you go home, if not in 1975, then in 1976, you will read about the liberation of Ban Me Thuot and you will know that soon we will liberate Hue, then Da Nang, then Saigon.'"

Sara stayed cool. Her nonchalance annoyed me. "Mmmmm. I gotta go to class now."

Although I wasn't supposed to make personal calls from my office, I tried to reach my closest comrades and then the leaders of the VVAW to figure out what to do next. Meanwhile, I looked forward to the arrival of the newspaper each morning and stayed pinned to KPFA's six o'clock news each night. My roommates ignored my excitement.

Then, the news made a teach-in irrelevant. The front page *New York Times* story began, "SAIGON, South Vietnam, Tuesday, March 18 - The Saigon Government has decided to abandon most of the Central Highlands of South Vietnam because the area has become militarily indefensible, well-placed Western sources said today." I danced as far as the kitchen phone cord allowed as I called Diana, Penny, Nancy and nine or ten other people.

That night, the anti-imperialist caucus of the San Francisco Women's Union met. We feared that President Ford would resume bombing, or even worse, order more US troops back to Viet Nam to try to rescue the tottering regime. The next night our group, the VVAW, the Union of Vietnamese and some others decided to organize an emergency march to demand Ford send no new aid to Thieu. We argued about whether we should call an emergency demonstration immediately, or give ourselves a week or so to do more outreach.

"Small demonstrations are worse than none. They show how weak we are." Mike argued.

"I agree. One week more will make a huge difference in the size of the crowd." I added.

Finally, we decided on a rally on Saturday March 30, that would end in a candlelight march through downtown San Francisco. We appointed a subcommittee to write a leaflet that would explain to bystanders the significance of Ban Me Thuot and our reasons for marching.

Then, four days before the march, at 6AM, my phone rang. It was Penny.

"Have you seen today's paper yet?" she demanded.

"Damn Penny. I'm not even up yet. What's going on?"

"Here's the front page of the *Times*. Are you ready?" She teased. She was giddy.

"Penny, READ!"

"Here goes the headline: "HUE LOST, DA NANG MAY GO; US ORDERS AN AID REVIEW AND BIG REFUGEE AIRLIFT; EVACUATION SPED..."

"Should I continue? Are you awake yet?"

"Penny, damn it. Keep going."

"SAIGON, South Vietnam, Wednesday, March 26 -The northern city of Hue, the cultural heart of South Vietnam, was abandoned by the Saigon Government's forces yesterday..." I was too excited to listen to more. "OK, Penny. I get it. What are you doing now? Can you come over? We need to rewrite the leaflet for Saturday's march." By March 28,

all of Thieu's troops fled Da Nang—South Viet Nam's second most important city. They abandoned the city without a fight. Their army uniforms—paid for by US dollars—littered the highway that connected Da Nang and Saigon. Reporters, accustomed to echoing US Army bulletins, were dismayed by the sudden and total collapse in the cohesion of the South Vietnamese army.

The posters for our Saturday march demanded "No aid for Thieu," as if this were a routine march, but our leaflet declared, "Today Da Nang, tomorrow Saigon." At least five thousand joined us. As we danced down Market Street, our joy was contagious. Most people we passed smiled. I flashed on marches ten years earlier, when bystanders threw eggs at us and the Hell's Angels beat us. I yelled, "Today Da Nang, tomorrow Saigon," until I lost my voice.

While Hue and Da Nang were liberated quicker than anyone expected, the last major battle of the Viet Nam War at Xuân Lôc dragged on from April 9 to April 23. During that time, the US government and press trumpeted horror stories about the Communist victory in the South. They featured pictures of dying refugees, rumors about the impending bloodbath, hysteria about the dangers facing the Americans still in Saigon and newly-manufactured sympathy for "orphans" that needed to be rescued. On April 10, Ford went to Congress for approval to send supplemental aid to the Thieu Regime. Our Coalition planned another protest.

A few days later, on April 16, I received a telegram. The only other telegram I had ever received was the one from the Viet Nam Women's Union that suggested the date for me to visit there. My hands shook as I opened the RCA envelope, trying hard not to tear the paper with the message. Were they inviting me to return? Impossible. It was too soon. The telegram read,

"Please denounce US maneuvers, intensification of US involvement, interference on pretext of evacuation of US personnel from South Viet Nam, together with present forceful evacuation of people and kidnapping children. Remember: since withdrawal of whole US contingent after Paris Agreement, no difficulty was seen with evacuation. Wish best successes. Sisterhood Greetings. Viet Nam Women's Union."

Once again, Bùi Thị Mè's parting words to me—"we are part of the

worldwide family of militant women...the oceans cannot separate our feelings of solidarity and love."—described exactly how I felt. Literally. The telegram was tangible evidence of that solidarity. Fortunately, we were already planning to occupy a Defense Department Office in downtown San Francisco.

On April 23, the same day Xuan Loc was liberated, the *San Francisco Chronicle* reported, "A group calling itself the Women's Committee for the Implementation of the Paris Peace Agreement staged a sit-in at the 8th floor of the Phelan Building where the US Army has a suite. They demanded implementation of the Paris Peace Agreement, an end to all intervention..." We also tried to expose Ford's humanitarian babylift charade as kidnapping and an insult to the Vietnamese people. While a sidewalk full of supporters chanted, police led 21 of us women out of the office in handcuffs, cited us for trespassing and released us. We were elated.

Three days later on April 26, another telegram from the Viet Nam Women's Union, dated April 25, arrived. I ripped the envelope open. *"Please mobilize progressive Americans to strongly condemn and immediately stop criminal acts by Ford/Saigon governments using suffocation bombs. CBU-55 in Xuan Loc.*

I glanced at the clock. I had developed the habit of checking the kitchen clock, adding 15 hours to calculate Hanoi time and imagined what my Vietnamese sisters were doing at that hour.

The newspapers and TV news reported "The Fall of Xuan Loc." Not one mentioned anything about retaliation by Ford or Saigon's US-supplied air force dropping suffocation bombs—Ford's last secret and desperate attempt to save the imperial face of the USA. Although my sisters in Hanoi must have known victory was imminent, they were also bracing for the worst. They had survived Nixon's genocidal bombing, but at tremendous cost.

"We must do something to expose this latest atrocity. We can't let Ford get away with some last-ditch attempt to save face," I argued at an emergency meeting that I had called. "But what? We just mobilized people for the Defense Department demo. You think we can do it again?" Carole asked.

"You know they have declared this the 'Ho Chi Minh Campaign,'

the final campaign of the war. Our sisters in Viet Nam must be working day and night to win. We must follow their example," I urged, but felt miserably inadequate. My own words sounded like cliches to me. I really had no idea what we could do beyond what we had already done. Calling a press conference seemed puny. That night, the meeting ended with only the decision to invite more people to another meeting on Monday, April 28th. Then hours before our Monday meeting, radio announcers on every station, in anguished, but excited tones, reported that the evacuation of US citizens and Vietnamese refugees "fleeing the communist" takeover would begin soon.

We were scheduled to meet in a church basement. We had invited around 35 people to plan a demonstration. A hundred showed up to get the latest news and to celebrate. Someone brought a radio and speakers. Someone else arrived with a ten-inch black and white TV. By 10PM San Francisco time, we sat transfixed by scenes of helicopters landing on the roof of the US Embassy to follow the evacuation order that had been issued a little more than two hours earlier. We laughed and clapped and marveled. Most of us could not believe we were actually watching the collapse of the most militarized post of the US Empire. Finally, the beleaguered church janitor convinced us to leave. I raced home to see if there was any new news on the radio that night.

When Tuesday, the 29th, dawned in San Francisco, it was already night time in Saigon. I hadn't yet prepared for my Tuesday morning class in San Jose, so I mustered all my self discipline to scrawl some discussion notes and resisted turning on the radio until I was in the car, speeding down highway 101 for my 11AM class. As soon as I found KCBS, 740 on the AM dial, I heard, *"For more than two hours now, ninety to a hundred passengers are crowding onto helicopters designed to carry 50. They are fleeing in panic as the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese troops enter Saigon."*

Rather than spend time looking for a free parking space as usual, I pulled into the paid lot and raced to New College. When I arrived, students and teachers were already huddled around a TV set in a meeting room that doubled as a lounge. An excited buzz filled the room. Someone yelled "Shut up! I can't hear what they're saying!" The announcer was speculating about the revenge the Communists might take against the Vietnamese who worked for the Americans. I grimaced, mumbled

"bullshit" and went upstairs to meet my class. It was a women's creative writing class, but no one objected to our talking about the question I raised. "We are watching a major historic event. But what is it: the fall or the liberation of Saigon?"

By the time the class was over, a bulletin had come across the TV screen downstairs that President Ford had ordered that no more Vietnamese be allowed on board US helicopters. Space had to be reserved for the evacuation of all US personnel from South Viet Nam. From the images of smoke rising from the Embassy I first concluded that the liberation army was attacking the Embassy itself. I was wrong. Soon the TV reporter explained that Embassy officials were burning important documents and millions of dollars in US cash to prevent the Communists from seizing them. Everyone laughed. I felt giddy.

That night, like every Tuesday night, I stayed at a house in San José where many of the College's radical instructors lived. They too were watching TV. On the 10 o'clock news, an astonished broadcaster announced,

"It is 1:00PM, April 30th, in Saigon. Late this morning, a tank with a Viet Cong flag broke through the gates of the Presidential Palace. And at 11:30AM local time, that flag was seen flying from the roof of the Palace. After a frantic evacuation, the City seems calm. Groups of people are gathering in the streets. Many are waving Viet Cong flags. The US Ambassador left the Embassy a few hours earlier at 5AM and a helicopter carried away the last US Marines at 7:53 AM. The War is over."

We erupted in cheers and applause. Someone yelled, "This deserves some champagne."

Then the image on TV shifted from that amazing flag-raising in Saigon, to the streets of Berkeley, filled with crowds waving the same red and blue flag with the gold star in the center and dancing on Telegraph Avenue. As they waved the National Liberation Front flag, they chanted, "Ho, Ho, Ho Chi Minh,/ NLF has just won. Bring the victory home." No one seemed to care that the revised anti-war chant no longer rhymed.

I laughed until I gagged. After downing a couple of glasses of champagne, I quietly left the dining room and went upstairs to the guest room where I stayed. I could not imagine doing anything except to write to

my family in Hanoi. I thought of each one, by name and typed with my fingers flying over the keys of the manual typewriter, never stopping to make corrections:

Dear Sisters: Thê, Thuy, Tuyen, Phuong, Bui Thi Mê, Mỷ....

Tonight, your night of victory—our night of victory—I want to run to you, share the ecstasy in the embrace of sisters that defeated the monster of imperialism....

Thê, Thuy, Tuyen, Phuong, Bui Thi Mê, Mỷ: now you can go home, really home. Thuy, you will see your children in Ho Chi Minh City. Phuong, return and return again. Bui Thi Mê: I think of you strolling the streets of Ho Chi Minh City—no disguises needed now. And as you join the celebration of victorious comrades in the streets, you must think of other times and shed tears for your beloved sister martyrs.

They are chanting "Bring the victory home" in the streets of Berkeley... Sisters, I can't ever remember feeling this kind of joy.... I love you—breathe your victory—it is the breath of our lives...We don't always rise together my dear sisters, but we all rise. Dear Vo Thi Thê, militant sister, you promised me, "We shall win." Yes. We all shall win."

On May 9, not even two weeks after the last US Marine left Saigon, Quy—my Vietnamese friend in Montreal—called with more fantastic news. A delegation of Vietnamese planned to visit Canada to thank Canadian people for their support and speak to the legislature about providing reconstruction aid. I jumped when he mentioned the delegation would include Phan Thi Anh, one of my cherished sisters from Hanoi. The delegation was planning to visit Montreal, Ottawa, and Toronto. Quy suggested that they might be persuaded to travel to Vancouver.

I pictured his mischievous smile. Was he implying we might organize a meeting on the West Coast that would include people from the US? Of course, the Vietnamese delegation could not legally enter the States. "They have to return to Viet Nam on May 18. But they would be able to stay in Vancouver for a few hours on the 16th or 17th," Quy remarked casually, as if he were arranging a dinner party for some close friends.

Without hesitating, I blurted into the phone. "We can do it. We

must do it. Tell them we'll welcome them in Vancouver. I'll call you tomorrow after I've had a chance to talk to some other folks about the arrangements." Euphoric, I slammed down the phone, my thoughts racing to plan a caravan to drive from San Francisco to Vancouver to welcome and celebrate victory with our Vietnamese comrades. At last, Diana, Jane, Peggy, and Penny—the other women who had worked so hard with me—would have a chance to meet Phan Thi Anh. Finally, they, and hundreds of other people, might experience for themselves what I had felt during my stay in Viet Nam: boundless energy from solidarity and love among Vietnamese and US women. The meeting would inspire all of us. That night, Diana and some of the other women who were at the core of our Women's Committee to Implement the Paris Peace Agreements crowded around the only large table at our favorite Vietnamese Restaurant. Everyone spoke at once.

"A week. We got a week. We gotta really have our shit together to pull this off in a week," I began after the initial excitement died down.

"We shouldn't even try to do this alone," Diana murmured. Everyone nodded.

"We need to plan the program, logistics, outreach, fundraising, security...We'll have to charter buses..."

"Wait," Penny interrupted. "One thing at a time. First things first. Money."

I hated fundraising, but if we didn't raise money for our guests' transportation and lodging, the meeting room, and a deposit on buses, nothing would happen. "We need $1200 immediately," I calculated aloud.

"I can lend some money, but I'll need it back before rent, June 1," Peggy offered.

In the end, that night we called our comrades in Viet Nam Veterans Against the War (VVAW), Peoples' Press, the Union of Vietnamese in the United States, Bay Area American Indian Movement (AIM), the Olga Talamantez Defense Committee and Tolteca Strikers and Prairie Fire Organizing Committee. We met late into the night. Later, we criticized ourselves for using time pressures as an excuse for not inviting a Black organization. Since the Black Panther Party had split into the un-

derground Black Liberation Army and a campaign organization to win Oakland elections, we had no on-going contact with them or any other Black organization.

I don't think any of our expanded planning group slept that night. By the next day, we raised more than enough money for the plane fare for the five Vietnamese to travel from Toronto to Vancouver, agreed on the goals for the event, and formed sub-committees to take responsibility for each of the major tasks. For the next couple of days, when I had no meeting to attend, phone calls to make or people to consult, I made lists: unending lists of more and more details to worry about. More than 50 organizations said they would invite their members and contacts to join the caravan. Our initial planning group no longer had any control over who would end up in Vancouver. This made me feel like a nervous mother-in-law planning a wedding in the middle of Times Square. I felt personally responsible for the Vietnamese. I worried about their security and about how to make sure they would be treated with respect, with sensitivity to their culture. The program would include a question-and-answer session. We would have to convince the sectarian groups not to challenge the Vietnamese or to make speeches about who they preferred in the Sino-Soviet split. I worried too about the lesbian and gay activists who might insist on asking why the Ten Point Program of the Provisional Revolutionary Government of South Viet Nam didn't mention the rights of gay people. I became an overbearing mama bear and ended up disrespecting both women in the US and our Vietnamese guests.

I typed out the Program and Ground Rules our planning committee had agreed on. Three pages of single-spaced pages of pale purple mimeographed type explained plans for the day, ground rules and logistics. On the last page, we included the lyrics to the "Song to Liberate the South," which we planned to sing to start the welcoming ceremony. The ground rules also asked people to remember that, "The Vietnamese dress modestly. Our dress shouldn't be offensive to them. Our neatness shows respect for them." There was that "mama bear" again.

Ultimately, all the worry and work had a deadline. About 300 people—some by chartered bus, some by car, some by plane—traveled to Vancouver. Only the ones on the buses received the mimeographed program and guidelines in advance. As everyone dribbled into the auditori-

um of Fisherman's Hall, the rhythmic thumping of a Canada-based First Nation's drum circle greeted them. The site of eight or ten indigenous people standing in a circle around the sacred drum—each pounding with a stick decorated with feathers—announced to all arrivals, they had entered a sacred space—for welcome and celebration.

While the drums beat, I met with Fern, from the Bay Area Chapter of AIM, Mike from VVAW and the Vietnamese to finalize our plans for the day. Once Phat, the leader of the Vietnamese delegation, announced they would stay the whole day, not just for the four hours they had planned, it was easier to agree on the program. As we stood to the side of the stage, my old friend Phan Thi Anh wrapped her arm around me and did not let go until the discussion was over. Then she whispered to me: "Oh, Arlene. It is wonderful to see you again. I want to share some of our thoughts with you."

I could hardly believe that Phan Thi Anh was standing right next to me and she had just told me she wanted to talk to me in private. I nodded my head up and down smiling and speechless from joy. Then finally I stammered, "Whenever you want. I've been dreaming about meeting you again ever since I left Hanoi. I am overjoyed that we can celebrate the victory together so soon."

"Yes. You are our dear friend. We know you share our victory." She playfully tugged on the edge of the shawl I was wearing—one I had crocheted from very precious blue and purple mohair skeins. "And I really like your shawl." Then she motioned that we should pay attention to the planning group discussion.

We agreed that Fern would deliver our official welcome of the Vietnamese to North American soil. But first, Ed Burstick, National Canadian Director of AIM, would present Vo Tan Phat, the leader of the delegation, with a peace pipe. Ed, a very tall, braided, strapping man, dressed in jeans and a tasseled traditional shirt, solemnly handed the feathered pipe to Phat, who was more than two heads shorter. Then, each with their faces glowing, held the other's fists high in a victory salute. I was overcome, both with joy and relief. I scanned the rest of the people in the auditorium. They were all standing as they clapped and whooped. It seemed almost everyone had tears streaming down their cheeks. Then Fern took

the mike and read:

"As native peoples of this continent, we welcome our sisters and brothers from victorious Viet Nam." Applause that began at the word "victorious" interrupted her reading. Then she continued, *"For centuries our people have been struggling against European and United States imperialism. Our welcome is a continental welcome, and through unity we shall see our victory just as you have seen your victory..."*

We had agreed that Fern would emcee the next segment of the program when various groups would read their solidarity statements. I would chair the following segment—when our guests gave their speeches and people asked questions. As I looked for Diana who had a stack of the mimeographed programs and guidelines, I saw Mike climb to the stage to read the VVAW statement. The auditorium cheered as he reached to shake Phat's hand and Phat embraced him instead. At that point, I thought about the stories I had read from the Winter Soldier Investigation about the atrocities that US GI's had committed in Viet Nam. I thought about Phat—who was also a vet—but for the "other side." Their embrace made me think anything—even our own liberation—was possible. Mike faced Phat, who was at his side, and not the audience. When he finally began to speak, a somber silence descended. Mike was weeping, struggling for composure, haltingly, he managed to say,

"Your victory has given us the happiest moment of our lives. Your courage guides us in our struggle. Our direct participation in US aggression..." He paused, trying to compose himself. *"Gave rise to our dedication to ending all wars of US imperialism. Your welcoming us, especially those of us who waged war on your people, as comrades and in friendship, teaches us the meaning of humanity..."*

Phat clapped, to encourage him, it seemed, and everyone else in the room applauded. During that pause, I found Diana.

"How's it going?" I asked.

She was beaming as she raised her arm, gesturing to the cheering crowd. "Can't you see?" I felt my anxiety lift.

Fern was reading a solidarity message from the Soledad Brothers, George Jackson's comrades. Then there was a message from the United

VANCOUVER, BC, May 1975. Celebrating the Vietnamese Victory. Phan Thi An is 3rd from right, Vo Than Phat is 4th from right, Arlene is at far left behind the speaker.

Farmworkers, CASA (a Chicano organization that denied the legitimacy of the US-Mexican border and fought for the rights of undocumented people), the Puerto Rican Socialist Party, National Lawyers Guild, the Union of Radical Political Economists, the Weather Underground and several gay liberation organizations. The messages, which were scheduled to end at 11:30AM, went on until 1PM. We had only 15 minutes left for lunch. I would have to postpone my meeting with Phan Thi Anh.

It was time for me to chair the afternoon session. I introduced Phan Thi Anh who opened the section of the program where her delegation was scheduled to speak about the meaning of their victory, the current situation and plans. She began,

"As a woman and mother, I feel the sorrow of all Vietnamese women—not just at the suffering, the loss of life and the separations of families in Viet Nam, but also at the loss to American mothers whose sons were killed, wounded or became addicted to heroin, mentally unbalanced or forced into exile or prison to avoid war..."

Many in the audience were nodding, but not clapping. Anh also cited inflation and unemployment in the US as "wounds of war." I looked at my watch, calculating how much time we would have left for questions if each of the Vietnamese delegation spoke as long as Anh. I heard her say,

"In Article 21 of the Paris Peace Agreement the US government promised to help rebuild Viet Nam. But this has not been done and will not be done unless you, dear friends, put pressure on your government to do so...to heal the wounds of war—both in the US and in Viet Nam—our two people must be united."

Everyone stood to give her a standing ovation. After they sat down, I announced. "People out there have clipboards." Five or six members of our planning committee waved their clipboards above their heads. "If you want to work on supporting Vietnamese reconstruction, write your name and phone number on the list." More applause.

To me, the rest of the day was a blur of speeches, applause, friendly questions, applause, hugs and more applause. Vo Than Phat gave the closing speech. For the first time that day, he seemed to choke up. As he held the peace pipe high, he spoke haltingly,

"I am so deeply moved that I cannot find the words to express what I feel. This act shows a very deep and warm friendship, a very militant heart that shows something that we as combatants can comprehend ourselves. You are struggling and will continue to struggle. And I am very hopeful that someday your victory will come."

The applause seemed endless. There was nothing more to say. But finally, I managed to announce: "Before you leave, please make sure you've signed our lists and stack your chairs against the wall. We'll see you all in San Francisco or wherever you come from. The struggle must continue." After the formal celebration, we had arranged for an informal dinner reception at a nearby church. Anh grabbed my arm and forced me to squeeze into the taxi that was taking the Vietnamese delegation from Fisherman's Hall to the church. Once again Anh had her arm around me.

"You know, Arlene, we were planning to leave six hours ago, but, when we saw the outpouring of love and solidarity, we decided to stay. We were very very very tired when we landed in Vancouver, but the militancy of your people gave us new energy."

As we stepped out of the taxi, Anh hugged herself. "Oooh, it's so cold here."

Automatically, I wrapped my shawl around her. When the reception was over and the delegation was on their way out, Phan Thi Anh turned to hand me the shawl.

"No. Please keep it. I crocheted it myself. It's a gift to you," I insisted.

Anh shook her head. "No, I can't keep it. It's too beautiful."

"Yes, you must. I will be very insulted if you refuse my gift." I smiled. "If you must return it, you can give it back to me the next time we meet in liberated Washington DC." She nodded and kissed me hard on the cheek and turned to go.

Part Four:
Splitting
(1976-1979)

Leaving San Francisco (1976)

A week after I returned from Vancouver, the semester and my teaching responsibilities at San José State ended. Finally, I was free to plunge into a whirlwind of travel, speaking invitations and meetings—often three or four a week. I felt productive, no longer speaking to the same sympathetic audiences. I spoke to a group of Stanford women law students about how the Vietnamese legal system was whittling away at patriarchy. Here was an audience who hadn't been involved in the anti-war movement but committed to raising $10,000 for reconstruction. I was relieved and proud that I kept the promise made to Bùi Thị Mè that we would help rebuild a bombed-out hospital in Quảng Trị. Also, although women's movement culture discouraged it, I had to admit that I liked being a "featured speaker," an expert, even a bit of a star.

At the same time, the familiar frenetic pace—speaking about Vietnamese women, raising money for Vietnamese reconstruction and trying to organize a post-war coalition in solidarity with Viet Nam—numbed me to the rumblings of a seismic political quake under my feet. The Vietnamese victory rendered our group, Women for the Implementation of the Paris Peace Agreements, obsolete. Nevertheless, the milestone required only a tactical renaming. Midway into 1975, I assumed the Vietnamese victory would boost our movement—inspire us to reach higher levels of unity, commitment and militancy. Ever since 1966, I was sure, we, along with the Vietnamese, were on a winning trajectory. Of course, there would be detours, momentary defeats—yet not once did I question the certainty of our ultimate defeat of US imperialism.

During the summer of 1975, intense debates raged throughout the movement. Some even argued that US imperialism was no longer our main enemy. "Fascist and bureaucratic capitalists have taken over the Soviet Union. That's why Soviet Social Imperialism has become the main enemy of the peoples of the world," my former father-in-law, Leibel Bergman, insisted. Leibel was the man who had first taught me about Marxism. Since he returned from China—where he married Vicki Garvin in a Red Guard wedding—he had become the ideological founder of a Maoist organization. Although he and I had fierce ideological battles, I still sought out his opinions. Once Vicki returned from China, I especially looked forward to our visits. Vicki, then in her fifties, was still beautiful with caramel-colored skin and a gracious smile that always welcomed my views. She had been a leader of the National Negro Labor Council. McCarthyism forced her into exile, in Ghana. During his visit there, Malcolm X stayed in the house she shared with Maya Angelou.

I sat, mesmerized, when she recounted how she and Malcolm X had spent many nights talking about Marxism and that she introduced him to the Chinese and Cuban Ambassadors in Ghana. Vicki was too modest to claim it, but I always suspected that it was primarily Vicki's powers of persuasion—not Malcolm's positive experiences with blond Muslims in Mecca—that led Malcolm to abandon his all-whites-are-the-devil philosophy and fully embrace Pan-African anti-imperialist politics. Now, as we sat in their modest two-room apartment in Newark, New Jersey, Vicki's nod of agreement to Leibel's remark about Soviet Social Imperialism shocked me. For emphasis, she suggested, "Read what Chairman Mao has written about it." I left their apartment dazed, disoriented.

Yet, that Fall, I refused to recognize that the era when opposition to the war in Viet Nam unified a myriad of sects and egos, had come to an end. Instead, I threw myself into teaching and writing about Viet Nam and building a new anti-imperialist organization: Prairie Fire Organizing Committee (PFOC). We rented a small storefront office on 24th Street, across the street from Fruitilandia in the heart of the Mission District. Several times a week, I met with twenty or thirty other white people who had studied *Prairie Fire,* published by the Weather Underground. The book analyzed imperialism, and affirmed the leading role of African, Latino and Asian people—inside and outside the US—in destroying im-

perialism. It urged white people to fight on the side of those oppressed people. It was a call to action.

Yet it was 1975, during "the worst recession in the US since World War II", and for the first time, the Weather Underground urged all who would listen to focus on working class oppression–implying that self-determination for Black and Brown people was no longer their priority. PFOC followed the Underground's lead, without acknowledging, let alone debating, this major about-face in political direction.

During the years since 1970, I had continued to meet regularly with women who were leaders of the Weather Underground, my leaders and occasional lovers. Sometimes weekly, sometimes monthly, sometimes not for months, I would follow a pre-arranged "trajectory" to our secret meeting place, often at the end of a less-travelled path of Golden Gate Park or, during the rainy season, at a restaurant or even a motel. I arrived at the beginning of the trajectory, or pre-planned route, 15 or 20 minutes before our actual meeting time and began what appeared to be aimless meandering. I couldn't see the Weather person who was observing my walk to make sure no one else was following me. When I finally met my contact at the end of the trajectory, we could be reasonably sure that we were safe. Several times, I waited at our meeting site for up to a half hour before I concluded someone from the Underground had decided it was too risky to show their face. During those times I made my way home, worried and dejected that I'd have to wait who-knows-how-long to learn the organization's analysis of the latest political developments and recommendations for our above-ground strategy.

To protect the Underground as an organization, capable of mounting illegal revolutionary action, and to protect the comrades whose capture might lead to long imprisonment, even death, we accepted the discipline of rigid rules of compartmentalization. We were never told, nor did we ask, anything about others' involvement, actions or plans. Compartmentalization enhanced security, but it also insulated the Underground's leaders from any criticism or accountability. It stifled debates and creativity—cutting off the political fresh air that any organization needs to breathe, grow, and adapt with the changing times—or even to stay relevant.

At first, shortly after my comrades in SDS went Underground, I looked to them for political guidance and approval. Yet, as building the anti-imperialist women's movement consumed my time and the Viet Nam Women Union inspired my commitments, without acknowledging it, I sought guidance from Underground less and less frequently. By 1975, I spent most of those clandestine meetings trying to keep Underground contacts abreast of the lessons I brought back from Viet Nam and the ways the above-ground movement was changing.

Nevertheless, for the rest of 1975, I worked to organize the National Hard Times Conference (HTC). In a sharp departure from our usual focus on the women's movement and solidarity with national liberation movements, we mobilized a coalition of organizations to fight for jobs, social services, and lower prices. I was responsible for Bay Area inter-organizational relations—that is to convince Carlos Vasquez, the leader of CASA, the Chicano revolutionary nationalist organization that joined us in Vancouver and other anti-imperialist actions; Mike Dawson, the Black leader of a Maoist organization called "Seize the Time"; and others to join the coalition. More than 2000 people from around the country—including hundreds of Black, Latino, Asian and Native people—ended up meeting in Chicago, at the end of January 1976.

The Conference was doomed by the arrogance of a handful of white radicals, including myself, acting like we could provide leadership to seasoned Black and Brown working class organizers. Many of the recognized leaders of the Conference had, in fact, already established an agenda in their clandestine meetings with the Weather Underground—leaving layers of unaccountable leadership. The Black Caucus, led by members of the Republic of New Africa, the American Indian Movement, and the Puerto Rican Socialist Party denounced the Conference as racist and opportunist. I joined a Women's Caucus, also furious that a handful of people controlling the stage refused to hear our demands.

For months, after the Hard Times Conference, self-criticisms and criticism of our political mistakes consumed Prairie Fire's meetings. Rather than plan our next demonstration in support of Black workers, Palestinian liberation or in solidarity with the students who were facing apartheid's tanks in Soweto, or with low waged undocumented women workers in California, we argued and argued among ourselves.

I was ashamed that I had promoted the Hard Times Conference and personally sought out Carlos and Mike to apologize. Carlos put his arm around my shoulders. "Hey, *compañera*. You and your *compañeros* fucked up. You blew it. You brought 2000 people to Chicago without any real political strategy. It was a lost opportunity. But it ain't the end of the world. Get over yourself." Then he kissed me lightly on the cheek.

"But..." I began.

Carlos, the leader of CASA and editor of *Sin Fronteras*, held his hand up. "Don't say more. You white folks are fucking self-indulgent. The world doesn't revolve around you—and it certainly doesn't revolve around your errors. Besides, I got something more to say."

I braced myself for more criticism of my arrogance.

"You know those days when you don't wanna get outta bed, when it seems like nothing is ever gonna change, so why bother?"

I nodded. Sure I did.

"Well, I have those days too. And you should know, that sometimes, when I'm feeling hopeless, I read a few pages from your book about how the Vietnamese women survived prison, torture and carpet bombing and went on to win. There have been more than a couple of days, when your book gave me hope, the energy to get out of bed."

Carlos' reminder of the international context of our commitments and appreciation for my work immunized me, to some extent, against the most extreme aspects of Prairie Fire's self-absorbed, even self-loathing, ideological struggles. First, following the line of the Weather Underground, PFOC insisted the only role for white people was to support national liberation movements. Then, with the Hard Times Conference, PFOC acted as if the only valid revolutionary activity was to demand jobs for all workers. After the Conference, most people in PFOC flipped back to their original position. But with the advice of Carlos and Vo Thi Thê—two indisputable leaders of national liberation struggles—echoing in my head, I resisted another flip. Or was it a flop?

During one of our interminable meetings to "evaluate the HTC" I argued. "I agree we're responsible for building a movement in solidarity with the oppressed people of Asia, Africa and Latin America. But we'll

stay isolated—a 'lunatic fringe'—unless more people here see how liberation movements abroad will improve their lives here." I felt like a broken record. Someone shot back. "It's just that kind of thinking that holds us back. You want to pander to white skin privilege." I was surprised, frustrated and hurt that most of the people in the room were nodding. I tried once more. Fuming after being accused of racism, I pulled rank. "You know, when I was in Hanoi, the president of the Viet Nam Women's Union told me we should trust the masses of women to join the anti-imperialist struggle. But we have to win their trust first. Join their struggles for jobs, equal pay, against rape. You know, work on domestic issues too."

They groaned. "Yes, but..."

I stopped listening, closed my notebook and imagined that political work in New York would be more productive. My mind wandered to my recent visit to New York. I had been a subscriber to the *Guardian*, an independent socialist weekly, and saw an announcement that a staff position was open. On a whim, I mailed them my resume. A few weeks later, they invited me to a job interview and even sent me a plane ticket to New York. I was thrilled and had no trouble convincing my political comrades, both above and under-ground, that it would be an opportunity to publicize our views. Soon, I found myself in lower Midtown Manhattan, in a booth in a cheap luncheonette, sitting across from Jack Smith, the Managing Editor and Irwin Silber, the Editor-in Chief. Jack had a reputation for using his Associated Press experience to keep the daily operations of the *Guardian* running smoothly. Irwin was the paper's ideologue. They were both a generation older than me—white survivors of the Old Left, the Soviet-led Communist Party of the USA and traditional Trotskyist organizations.

Jack ordered coffee, black. Irwin ordered pastrami on rye. I ordered my favorite New York City treat: rice pudding. I immediately liked Jack. His broad smile fit the man who found something to appreciate in everyone, who seized any opportunity to offset the stress of meeting constant deadlines. He began, "We've read your book. It was wonderful."

His compliment flattered me, and invited me to drop my interviewee's guard. "Thank you." I smiled, and wanted to ask, "If you liked it so much, why didn't you review it?"

As if he read my mind, Irwin remarked, "We've been planning to review it, but haven't found the right person to do it. We need a woman on staff with the correct understanding of 'the women's question' to do justice to your book." I wondered if he saw me wince when he relied on that phrase 'women's question'? For several years, me and my comrades had railed against the phrase, which we believed exposed the sexism of the Old Left. In our minds, there was no "question"—just the enemy: the system of oppression called patriarchy or male supremacy that re-enforced imperialism and white supremacy.

"Actually, you would be the ideal person to review the book," he paused. His smile set me on edge. "But that wouldn't be kosher." Maybe he was hoping I would disagree and offer to review my own book.

"I'm sure there are many people who would like to review it. I could give you some names," I proposed.

Irwin shifted his considerable weight and sunk deeper into the cushion of his booth. "We can talk about that later. Let's get down to our business for today." He paused.

I nodded and asked, "Do you have questions about my resume?"

Jack, still smiling, doodled on his napkin, and shook his head, "Of course not." The waitress tilted a coffee pot over his empty cup, he met her eyes, "Thank you, yes." She poured.

Then, Irwin returned to his agenda. "It's obvious you can write. Your book is a damn good piece of journalism. And we need a woman on staff who has your experience with the anti-imperialist women's movement."

He grimaced when I asked, "How many women do you have on staff?"

Irwin took a bite of his sandwich and waved his hand in front of his face as if to shoo away a fly. "We have plenty of women. And don't you think they're just doing clerical work. Karen Gellen is our Foreign Affairs Editor, and Fran Beal our Business Manager. That's Fran Beal from the Third World Women's Alliance." I regretted asking the question. "That's not the point," Irwin continued. "My question to you is, do you think you agree enough with the *Guardian* line to join our staff? That's the most important issue."

In fact, I wasn't sure how they defined their line. But, at the time, I assumed the difference between their brand of Marxism-Leninism and mine was not significant. "Irwin," I answered sincerely, "I and everyone I know looks forward to the arrival of the new *Guardian* every week for news about liberation struggles around the world. No one else has it right about Cuba and Angola. I would be honored to be a part of your staff." That was evidently enough to satisfy him. He glanced at Jack who nodded and offered me his hand, "How soon can you start?" I thought aloud. "I have to finish the semester at my teaching job, and some other obligations in San Francisco. It will take me a while to pack up my house and drive across country."

"We can give you $300 for moving expenses." Jack volunteered.

"Great. I guess I can be here by late summer, early fall."

"The pay is $89 a week in cash. Some of our staff people collect unemployment from their previous jobs. We don't know anything about that." He winked. "There's an additional allowance if you have kids. You don't have kids, do you?"

"No." I was 34, and after Lincoln left me, I was sure I would not allow myself to love a man again, let alone have kids. I added, "Money is not important to me."

In late August 1976, the Saturday before I planned to leave San Francisco, most of the women I felt close to or had ever worked with came to a farewell party that Diana had arranged at her apartment. Forty or fifty women, mostly holding wine glasses or joints, crammed into that old second floor railroad apartment in the Mission District. Posters announcing marches, rallies, political exhibits—everything I had worked to organize over the years—covered the walls. China played the sax, Peggy the drums, Miranda the flute and Carole played an electric piano.

Nancy's speech was a narrative that spanned my 12 years in San Francisco. She highlighted the most recent years when I had led much of the anti-imperialist women's movement in San Francisco. I had often had a hard time crying when I was in pain, but tears invariably welled up when something positive was said about me. Penny wrapped her

arms around me as I sobbed throughout Nancy's tribute. I had never felt so loved.

Yet, it hadn't been a difficult decision to move to New York in late summer 1976. The Viet Nam War was over, and San Francisco Prairie Fire's debates felt like a dead end. San José State cut my teaching job from three courses to one and *The Guardian* job offered an expanded political horizon. Ever since I returned from the trip to Viet Nam and Paris via the trans-Siberian railroad, a feeling that San Francisco was a political Disneyland haunted me. "I need to leave the comfort of San Francisco, meet the challenges of the real world," I often repeated.

My friend, Beverly, the radical lawyer and feminist who already had grown children, scoffed, "once you live in San Francisco, you can't live anywhere else. You'll be back."

Moving day finally arrived. I had stuffed my stereo, typewriter, precious ceramics, keepsakes from Viet Nam and Peru, and any other fragile stuff into my aging little yellow Datsun. Papers, clothes, and the rest of the contents of my closet filled all remaining space, except for the driver's seat. On a hot Monday in late summer, I tried to drive the car onto two makeshift planks that connected the parking space in front of my house to the bed of the 16-foot U-Haul truck.

In first gear, I approached the planks, advanced one or two feet onto them and slammed on the brake. I prided myself in my driving skills but, as the steering wheel became slippery from my sweat, I was too afraid to move. The tires may have measured narrower than the planks, but the image of the car crashing to the ground if I steered only an inch or two off-center paralyzed me. I gently eased the stick into neutral, slowly lifted my foot off the brake and allowed the car to roll backwards to the safety of the street.

"What happened?" Cindy yelled. "Why didn't you keep going?"

"I got scared the planks are too narrow. Besides, I don't think I can get enough power to drive up the steep planks and then stop in time to avoid crashing through the truck's wall to the drivers' compartment."

Cindy glanced at her watch. We had planned to leave by 9AM. It

was already 10:30 and once we got the car into the truck, we still needed to pack the furniture and boxes of books around the car. Cindy was a tallish, white woman with flashing bright blue eyes, a huge afro-styled crown of black hair and charismatic beauty. She must have consumed 3000 calories a day in nervous energy, which kept her boyish body lean. She had the confidence of a singer with a long performance history, she was brilliant, and fiercely radical. She had only recently turned 21. We all marveled at how this woman who was more than a decade younger than most of us could hold her own in the most complex political discussions.

"Well, you gotta try again," Cindy insisted. Her impatience told me, "If the Vietnamese women you met can shoot down B-52 bombers, you can drive the fucking car up those planks."

I tried again. In fact, I tried over and over for another half hour. Finally, I announced,

"This is impossible, there must be another way."

Diana suggested we drive to the warehouse district and look for a loading dock.

Why hadn't we thought of that before! Sweat mixed with relief and frustration. I drove the truck towards the Bayview District in search of a warehouse. Diana joined me in the cab. Cindy followed in the Datsun. Finally, we found a loading dock that had a wide ramp. I was amazed at how easily I maneuvered the car up the broad cement ramp and slowly eased it into the waiting truck. Finally, around four in the afternoon, the truck was fully loaded.

"I'll drive the first shift," Cindy announced and gracefully swung herself into the driver's side of the cab.

"Maybe we should wait until commuter traffic dies down," I suggested.

"Damn, Arlene, we need to get this show on the road. We gotta be in New York in time for the meeting Saturday morning."

Reluctantly, I agreed. There were no more goodbye's to say. Now, standing on the sidewalk next to that overloaded U-Haul, I hugged Diana goodbye one more time. And as she turned to go, not the faintest

sign hinted that I might not see her again. I called one last time to my sometimes lover, and very close comrade,

"Write to me at the Brooklyn address. I'll see you at the national meeting next month."

Suddenly I remembered writing my sixth grade "career book" on the work of foreign correspondent, my dream job. Now, I was about to begin a job for the leading independent radical newspaper in the country. I would be responsible for covering Viet Nam and other international issues, women, prisons and more. I already had a place to live in the PFOC collective women's house—and would participate in building the anti-imperialist women's movement there. Everything had fallen into place.

Cindy was a member of that collective who had only been visiting San Francisco briefly. I had barely spent time with her in San Francisco, and was looking forward to getting to know her better during those five days on the road. She spent the first few hundred miles talking about the work they had done to organize the Defense Committee for Assata Shakur. They raised thousands of dollars for her legal fees. I was impressed.

Some contraption did not allow us to drive that truck faster than 50MPH. It made for a tedious cross-country drive, but we reveled in our image: two jeans-wearing women, driving a ten-ton truck. The last morning on the road, I snapped a picture of Cindy, the sleeves of her blue denim shirt rolled up, in a macho pose, leaning against the side of the truck. Somehow, I managed to include a rainbow in the frame. I took the appearance of that rainbow as a sign that all would go well in New York.

I had been looking forward to escaping from San Francisco meetings, but within 24 hours of pulling that truck up to the Brooklyn brownstone, I found myself sitting in another self-criticism session that was sharper than any I had ever attended in San Francisco. During the next few weeks, my 60-hour work-week job at the *Guardian* forced me to miss a lot of collective meetings. I didn't mind. Each of the paper's staff members was expected to have thoroughly read the daily *New York Times* before the workday began at 9AM sharp. Then we met. There was only one item on that meeting's agenda, "what's new that we should cover this week?" I loved doing research for my articles. I even loved proofreading. I could not believe I was

getting paid to research the political economy of women's oppression and that thousands of people would read what I had written.

In those early weeks, I threw myself into work at the *Guardian*, but I also looked forward to settling into my new home in Brooklyn—a half hour subway ride from the *Guardian* office. Each of the four other women who lived there had her own room. In my room, cartons of books and clothes still surrounded my bed. A pile of posters—including a number of original silkscreens from Viet Nam—threatened to block the path to the bathroom. When I first arrived, my housemates welcomed those posters. I offered to put some up in the living room, kitchen, hallways. But some days later, when Lena saw me hanging a prized Madame Binh poster in the hallway, she reached for my arm, "What the fuck are you doing, Arlene?"

"I'm putting this up. You loved it so much, I thought you'd like it in a common area."

"Stop. We already have enough of your Vietnamese stuff around the house. Don't you care about any other struggle? What about the Black Liberation Movement?"

I didn't attempt to answer. Just nodded, got down from the chair, retreated to my room and carefully placed the poster on the pile of the others on the floor. I was too tired to argue. Of course, I cared about the Black Liberation Movement. And after all, she was a sister, a comrade, who had really wanted me as a housemate.

By the third week, I still hadn't had time to unpack. Working more than full time at the *Guardian*, still trying to raise money and organize political support for Vietnamese reconstruction and PFOC meetings four or five times a week began to take their toll. I couldn't suck enough chewable vitamin C's to stay healthy. In San Francisco, I got one winter cold a year. But here as I was climbing the stairs up from the Park Slope subway stop, a blast of 85 degree humid air greeted me and I began to sneeze my head off. I trudged the few blocks to the brownstone with my mind fixed on sleep. When I arrived, Lena was sitting on the steps, as many New Yorkers did on humid nights.

"Were you working at the *Guardian* this late, again?" Lena snapped her question.

"Who the hell do you think you are! A damned dorm mother enforcing curfew!" I shot back without thinking, then sneezed.

"You missed another collective meeting. We have to talk." She was sitting sideways, leaning against the banister with her legs stretched across the steps, effectively blocking my way.

"Can it wait? It's almost midnight. I've been going since six this morning. I told you the newspaper goes to press on Thursday nights. Everyone has to stay late to proofread." I sneezed again and searched my purse for a tissue.

Lena frowned. "We agreed you could work at the *Guardian*—but only if it didn't interfere with your collective responsibilities. A lot of people are saying that you're not holding your own with collective work." Then she bent her legs, preparing to stand.

I took advantage of her folded legs to make it to the top step.

"Look Lena, I'm really too tired to talk now. I promise, I'll be home early tomorrow. Let's talk then."

She nodded. "Suit yourself."

I climbed past her to my second-floor room. Between my cold and the stifling hot humid air, I thought I might suffocate. I collapsed on the bed and dreamed that I was in a foreign country, in a hotel, but could not find my room. I trudged from one corridor to the next, floor to floor, trying to coax whoever I passed, "please let me stay here." I don't remember when I first dreamed this outsider's dream, always looking for a place to stay, a space where I belonged. For decades, it's been a nightmare that continues to stalk me in my sleep.

I missed the meeting where the roiling hostility among the various crisscrossing factions of the Prairie Fire Organizing Committee boiled over. At the time the debates raged between those who wanted action and those who wanted study; between those who wanted to organize to support workers' struggles and those who wanted to support Black, Brown and Asian movements; between those who accepted the leadership of people underground and those who didn't; between those who followed West Coast leadership and those who followed the East Coast

leadership; between those who followed women's leadership, especially lesbians, and those who did not (even though they would not admit it). In New York, Lena and Cindy, my housemates, were the undisputed lesbian leaders of the purge of all those deemed not only to be incorrect for not supporting national liberation movements enough, but also traitors. I was proofreading, in Manhattan, late night at the *Guardian,* when the meeting in Brooklyn must have ended. I was bent over reading a galley sheet when Jack tapped me on the shoulder.

"There's a call for you, she says it's urgent. She wouldn't say her name. I hope you can make it quick, we're due at the printers in a half hour."

I pressed the lit button on the phone at my desk. "Hello?"

"Arlene, you should have been at the meeting tonight." I recognized Cindy's voice.

"You said you wouldn't schedule meetings on Thursdays. You know I gotta work late at the *Guardian* every Thursday night. Anyway, what happened? Why you calling?"

Cindy's usual clipped voice reached a lower degree of chill. "I've been assigned to inform you that the collective has reached a decision about your membership. You're out."

"What? What are you talking about?"

"Do not come back to the house. Not tonight, not any night. Do you understand?"

"NO. What is this about?" I knew she was serious, but I felt like I was in some grade B anti-communist movie caricaturing Stalin's era. "Are you serious?"

"I have nothing more to say."

"Wait, Cindy, don't hang up. I deserve some explanation. Where will I sleep tonight?"

"Where you sleep is no concern of ours. There is no way someone who has been conspiring with our enemies can sleep under our roof. Figure something out."

"But it's too late to make any arrangements and you have all my stuff—even my money is in the house."

Cindy's voice softened a tiny bit. "Look Arlene, I shouldn't do this, but if you tell me where you keep your money and stuff you'll need for a couple of days, I'll bring it to you at the Park Slope subway station."

Amazed at how quickly I shifted into crisis mode, "Thanks. I'll be there by 11PM tonight."

She was cool again. "Don't be late. I won't wait." And then hung up.

I called Cary, an old, non-activist friend from college who I hadn't spoken to in years. "Can I stay at your place tonight? Please don't ask me why. Thank you. I'll be there by midnight."

It was almost 10:00PM. I felt nauseous and frightened as I walked towards Jack's desk.

"I'm sorry Jack, I can't finish proofing tonight. I'm really sorry but I gotta go."

I must have looked so tense, he didn't question me at all. "Sure kid, go ahead."

On the subway, I began to make a list of things to ask Cindy. I realized I had no control over their decision, but I craved an explanation. I arrived at the subway platform fifteen minutes early. At precisely 10:58, I spotted Cindy and Lena taking long, quick strides towards me. They looked like they had a plan to hurl me off the platform into the next on-coming train. Lena spoke first, without any greeting. "Before we give you your stuff, give us your house key."

Shaking, I rummaged obediently in my purse, detached their house key from my keyring and handed it to her. "Lena, please, what is this about?"

"Don't try to pretend you have no idea," she sneered.

"I know we don't agree on everything. But..."

"Arlene, stop the bullshit. Look, we know you have betrayed us."

I searched my mind frantically trying to figure out what I might have done that gave them the impression I had snitched to the FBI, the cops, the enemy. I could imagine nothing.

"Lina, whoever might have accused me is lying and couldn't possibly have proof."

In fury, she growled her response. "Do you deny having contact with ___ and ___." She named people who were underground. "Do you deny hiding this information from us, your supposed comrades? We know your loyalty is to them, not to us."

"Oh, that's it!" And I enjoyed a momentary relief. "They're not the enemy." And I thought, but dared not say, "don't you understand compartmentalization?"

"It's precisely that kind of arrogance that makes you so dangerous. Others in your position have confessed, written self-criticisms, but you're hopeless. Here's the stuff you asked Cindy to bring, don't try to contact us again." She thrust a brown shopping bag into my stomach.

Weariness washed over me. I wasn't sure I even wanted to defend myself. "What about the rest of my things? My whole life is at your house?"

"We'll leave your boxes and mattress out on the curb Sunday morning. Get them then."

"OK, What time? I'll need to beat the neighborhood scavengers to them."

It was Cindy's turn to speak. "We'll call you and tell you. You do not call us. You must understand, If this had happened in a Black organization, you would be dead."

Unmoored (1976)

There I was at 11PM, a native New Yorker driving around Manhattan, looking for a cheap hotel to spend the night. I had no idea where to go. East on 10th until I hit Avenue D, right on D, West on 11th until 3rd Avenue. Up and down, back and forth. I slowed on the darker streets thinking, the darker the street, the cheaper the hotel. I passed nothing that resembled a bed for the night. Finally, I parked near the East River.

I couldn't go back to Cary's couch. She didn't want me there when her boyfriend came over, and I was too proud to let her know how desperate I was. I thumbed through my address book searching for someone else to call. I found no one. Most of my friends in New York belonged to the faction of PFOC that had banished me. I could not ask my co-workers at the *Guardian*, and certainly not my parents, for a place to stay. They would demand to know what happened. How could I tell them the truth without violating the organization's basic rules of security? Besides, the pain and humiliation of my exile was still too raw to expose to the *Guardian* people, who I hardly knew; or to my parents who had always criticized my choices.

I shivered. "Fuck it. It's too cold to spend the night in the car." I resumed my search until I passed a sign lit by a streetlight. "Rooms for rent, by day, week and month." I double parked in front, and timidly knocked on the door. No answer. I was almost relieved. Images of filthy mattresses, rats, roaches and ugly horny men with knives filled my head. I walked quickly back to my car. Just before I got in, a large white woman in a

flowered house dress, with her head in curlers, filled the doorway. She yelled in my direction,

"Ya need a room?"

"Um, yes," I managed.

"How long you want it for?" She looked me up and down and then turned her inspection to my double-parked car.

"I don't know. A day, maybe a week." I was sure in a week I would either move back to Brooklyn or find my own place.

"It's $23 a night, $130 a week. Ten bucks more if you have guests. You got a guest?"

I shook my head emphatically. The suggestion struck me as preposterous. "No."

"It's cash in advance."

I only had about fifty in cash on me. "I'll pay you the $23 now and give you the rest for a week tomorrow. Okay?"

"Either you rent by the night or by the week. You can't have it both ways, honey." Just then someone pulled out of a parking space a few doors down. I sighed. "Fine. I'll give you the $23 as soon as I get that parking space."

I should have checked the room before I gave her a dime. It was a windowless cell. The odor of mildew overwhelmed me. Still, I was relieved to find no visible roaches or rodent droppings. The toilet was down the hall. I was thankful I didn't need to use it right away. Suspicious stains, ranging from rusty yellow to brownish red spotted the sheets. I spread my raincoat over the sheets and used my purse for a pillow.

Angry voices of men yelling echoed from the left end of the hall outside my thin door. Loud laughter countered from the other end. I left the light on, and lay down on my back, kept my clothes on, but unhooked my bra. Staring at the bulb, I hoped for sleep. Time crawled.

Sleep was impossible. I tried writing in my journal.

Here I am, just a month shy of my 34th birthday—with no place to live, and for the first time in a decade, with no political home. What kind of

revolutionary am I? What should I try to join? Do I even want to try? In so many organizations even lovers denounce lovers. They are rats leaving a sinking ship. This is what happens when a bunch of white petty bourgeois intellectuals try to make careers out of revolution. Is that who I am? In China, they've denounced Lin Biao and arrested the Gang of Four. Who could have imagined Mao's wife arrested for treason barely a month after he died! I don't think I can ever give up on revolution, but if it weren't for the Vietnamese, it would be much harder to hang on...

The last sentence was scrawled, hardly legible. Perhaps I dozed. Finally, morning came—very early morning. I fastened my bra, put on shoes, readjusted my clothes, and opened the door to my room just wide enough to peek out. The hallway was silent and empty. I quickly headed for the toilet. Then I raced back to the room, grabbed my purse and headed towards the front door. I had to find another place to stay immediately.

I had always loved walking amidst the anonymous bustle of New York. That morning, shortly after dawn, the streets were still empty and quiet, except for the clang of garbage men hoisting pails onto their trucks. No sense using my car. It was parked in a free, but precious, space that would be legal until the next morning. I walked until I was sure Jack was in the office so I could call in sick. And as I sat in a coffee shop, relishing a fresh New York bagel and cream cheese with a cup of black coffee, I carefully combed the classified sections of *The Village Voice and The New York Post.* I circled nine or ten listings: all studio apartments within walking distance of the *Guardian* with rent under $160 a month—the maximum I thought I could afford. For the first time since Lina snatched the key to the Brooklyn brownstone from me, I felt optimistic. It wouldn't be so hard to find a new place to live after all.

From the pay phone in the back of the coffee shop I began dialing. Most of the numbers just rang and rang. No one picked up, but I did manage to make appointments to see three apartments that morning. The first one, on Avenue C between 10th and 11th, was a hell hole. The super ushered me into the four-story building. "We have three vacancies—one on the second and two on the third floors. We're still fixing up the 4th floor. We had a fire there. Which one would you like to see?"

"The second floor," I answered immediately.

"Follow me. You don't smoke do you? The last tenant started that fire on the 4th floor with a cigarette."

By the time we reached the second floor I felt nauseous. The place reeked so bad, I figured that they must have put the fire out with piss. I turned and started down the steps before he could find the right key to open the door to 2C. "Hey, where ya going?"

"I'm sorry to take your time. I can't live here," I called back to him as I fled to the street.

The second apartment listed also seemed uninhabitable. My optimism drained. I thought of my beautiful San Francisco room that opened directly onto the garden. Each of us chipped in $75 a month to live in that sunny luxury. What the hell was I doing in New York, I asked myself, as I dragged to the third address. 512 East 11th Street. "It's between A and B, closer to A," a man with a soft voice and Black Southern accent had explained.

As I turned onto 11th, a burned-out car, in front of a burned-out building, met me. Trash and rubble littered the street as if garbage pickup service had been suspended indefinitely. Half the buildings on the block were demolished. It looked like I had entered a war zone. If 512 hadn't been so close to the corner, or if Joe hadn't been sitting on the stoop, I would have turned around and left 11th Street forever.

Joe stood up and waved. I saw a huge, smiling, dark skinned Black man—at least six and a half feet tall. He must have weighed nearly 300 pounds. He wore a gray janitor's jumpsuit, like most supers. Unlike most supers, he had a small gold loop pierced into his large ear and a purple taffeta sash around his waist to announce his gay pride. As I approached, he seemed the opposite of New York chill: he was neighborly, hospitable. "You must be the young lady who called about the apartment. I'm Joe, the guy you spoke with on the phone." He held out his right hand. I shook it and nodded in spite of the decision I thought I had made that I wouldn't consider living on this block.

"Well, do you want to see the place now?"

I gave him a tentative nod and joined him on the stoop.

"I just installed a new lock and security bars on the windows. C'mon, I'll show you."

I followed him up one flight of metal steps. The stairwell was not well lit, but emitted no foul odors. At the landing, there were two adjacent heavy steel doors: one labeled 2A and one labeled 2B. "I live in 2B," he pointed to the door on the left. "That's the vacant one." I held my breath as he opened the door to 2A. I expected to see an interior that matched the war zone on the street. Instead, the door opened into a tiny hallway that led to a large airy room with a big bay window that framed trees and a backyard, not a cement wall. A stove, sink and fridge lined the opposite wall. Everything was clean and quiet. I imagined I had found my sanctuary, then panicked. "There's no bathroom?"

Joe motioned to a door I hadn't noticed in the right wall of the hallway. Then he opened it and pointed proudly to the immaculate formica bathtub and sink. "If you have a lot of stuff, I could put some shelves in for you," he offered. "And I'll have the place covered with new paint by the end of next week."

I frowned. "I need a place right away. The ad says it's $135 a month. Is there a deposit?"

"I don't deal with the money. You'll have to talk to the owner about that. But if you want to paint it yourself right away, I bet he'll give you a break on the rent. Wait a sec, I'll get you his card." As he glided out the door to his place, I marveled at how gracefully this giant of a man moved. He returned with the card and a slice of carrot cake on a plate.

At *The Guardian* staff meeting the morning after I got the keys to my new apartment, I announced that I couldn't stay past 7PM that night because I needed to paint my new place. "Oh, we thought you already had a place in Brooklyn?" Karen was curious.

"I decided it's a lot more convenient to live on the Lower East Side. I hate taking the subway home late after work," A plausible explanation, I thought. No way I would tell them that I had been kicked out of the Brooklyn collective, whose ideology they had scorned. Since I was becoming aware of their stubborn insistence on reducing struggles against white supremacy and male supremacy to simple struggles against class oppression, it would be like admitting to a potential rival that my husband had just left me.

Karen nodded her approval. "Where is it?"

"On 11th Street. It'll be an easy walk home from work."

"Eleventh!" Karen was alarmed. "11th and what? I hope you didn't go too far east. 11th and B is a snake pit of drug dealing."

"Well actually, it's between A and B," I stammered. Out of desperation to avoid another night in that horrible hotel, had I gotten myself into daily danger?

"Closer to A or closer to B?" Karen needed to know.

"Uhhh, A, closer to A. The second building from the corner," I answered tentatively.

Karen sighed her exaggerated relief. "Oh, good. You should be fine, as long as you stay away from the east end of 11th."

During the day, I tried to concentrate on the first major story I had been assigned: the protests following the murder of Orlando Letelier. I had been looking forward to working on a series on the political economy of women's oppression. On September 21, in the heart of Washington DC, a bomb exploded under the car of Orlando Letelier, the former Chilean Ambassador to the United States. During the US-sponsored coup against the Allende government, General Pinochet murdered Allende, most of his cabinet and thousands of the people who supported Chile's first democratically-elected socialist government. A reign of murder, torture and disappearances followed. Letelier escaped, and, for three years, while working as a professor at American University, he effectively led the exiled Chilean resistance against the dictatorship. Now he was blown to smithereens, along with Ronni Karpen Moffitt, a young staffer.

The announcement of Letelier's assassination stunned me. After all, he was a professor, a diplomat, a tall white man with blondish red hair and the bearing of an aristocrat. I still had vivid memories of the murder of Black Panthers by police—nearly a hundred. The first was 16-year-old Bobby Hutton. I wept then, was outraged, but not shocked. It was 1968, at the height of the Panthers' power, when they declared themselves the vanguard of the revolution. At rallies and marches, I chanted along with them, at the top of my lungs, "Revolution has come, time to pick up the gun!" In those days, we expected casualties. Then the most militant Panthers disappeared into the underground Black Liberation Army (BLA). There had

been little news of political assassinations since 1973, when police killed Zayd Shakur and captured a wounded Assata Shakur. Besides, Letelier had only advocated peaceful economic boycotts of the dictatorship.

By 7PM that night, I had interwoven my own analysis with lines and lines of quotes that I had collected from hours of phone interviews. It would become a full-page lead story. I felt proud of the work. By midnight, I finished painting my new apartment. The sticky tropical weather of late New York summer had suddenly given way to chilly fall evenings. Even so, that night I slept soundly with the window wide open, welcoming the cool air to dissolve the paint fumes.

For the next few nights, I worked furiously, arranging the bed, night table, sound system and dresser on one side of a long low bookcase that stretched the length of the room. The table and two chairs on the other side of the bookcase doubled as kitchen and study. Only a very narrow path of floor space remained on either side of the bookcase. Before I got down to serious unpacking, I unearthed the carton that held records, found my favorite Nina Simone album and put it on the turntable. I sang to "Pirate Jenny" and "Four Women" as I shelved several cartons of books, and decided on places for dishes, cooking equipment, sheets, clothes, precious gifts from Viet Nam and souvenirs from Peru, and Cuba. Finally, I plopped on the bed, thumbing through the pile of posters, trying to choose which to tack on the limited wall surface.

By the fourth night, after I wended my way around a newly abandoned skeleton of a car, deposited on the sidewalk in front of 512 E 11th Street, trudged up the stairs, and remembered to turn the keys counterclockwise in the three locks to 2A, Madame Binh beamed down from the wall to welcome me. I was home. Cozy and safe, with my neighbor Joe, on the other side of the wall. I thought he would help me if I ever needed help.

For the next couple of months, I threw myself into writing a weekly major feature article and shorter news stories for the *Guardian*. The 15 or 20 triple spaced "takes" I handed to the copy editor each week represented hours of research and careful calibration of how much I could focus on women's oppression without having Irwin delete passages he considered "bourgeois feminist". He was happy as long as I wrote about

Vietnamese women or the economic exploitation of women in the US As soon as I highlighted the ways men oppressed women inside the family or on the street, he unsheathed his blue pen and deleted any challenge to his dogma that the women's movement must be subordinate to working class unity. The first time he chopped up my article, I marched from my desk in the back of the office, past five rows of desks to his perch at the front of the room. I waved the edited galley inches from his bald head, "You can't do this Irwin. It's my article, with my byline."

"But it's my newspaper." He grinned. "You have a lot to learn, my dear, about how a professional paper is run."

"I thought you and Jack approved of my doing this series," I countered.

"Yes, we want you to write about how the capitalist system exploits women," he intoned.

I couldn't believe he didn't understand. "That is what I'm doing. But women's exploitation is not the same as men's. We also deal with patriarchy which, even Engels recognized, predates capitalism. Now women are trapped in a segregated labor market. Damn it." I yelled and didn't notice that I had attracted a small crowd. Barbara, the copy editor; Karen the international editor and Jack stood in the small space to my left.

Barbara, in the voice of a school teacher impatient with a troublesome child, interjected. "It's too late to make any changes. The paper goes to press in an hour. You were just supposed to be proofing your galleys."

I could not tolerate the thought of thousands of women—including the women who had just accused me of betraying our principles of anti-imperialist feminism—reading my eviscerated article. I had hoped my series would prove to them that they had made a mistake and should welcome me back to the fold. Sweat streamed from my forehead.

"If you won't run my article the way I wrote it, then don't run it at all."

Jack interjected. "Is that what you really want, Arlene?" His relaxed tone belied the tension of a looming deadline. Without hesitating, I declared, "Definitely."

Irwin and Jack's eyes met and agreed. Then Jack turned to Barbara.

"I suppose we could pull Arlene's article and fill the space with Karen's piece, the one we were holding for next week. That will give us time to resolve this problem." He touched my shoulder gently. "That will work? Right, Arlene?"

I nodded and stalked to the back room to find another galley to proofread. I was still so angry, my eyes blurred as I scanned the headlines of the articles waiting to be proofed. Karen grabbed my arm before I noticed she was there. "Arlene, come with me, we need to talk." I didn't know Karen personally at all. I had heard that she lived with Jack and had a couple of children from her previous marriage to a well-known movement ideologue. None of her articles that I had read had left an impression. I followed her to the ladies' room, assuming she was about to offer me support. There wasn't much space in the makeshift ladies' room that had been converted from an old janitor's closet. She began to lecture me before I even closed the door.

"Look, Arlene. You gotta calm down. This is no way to behave. We are your comrades."

This time I pulled my arm away when she reached for it. I hadn't thought that she or Barbara or Irwin, or even Jack, were my comrades. They were the inner circle of the publishing collective. I was still on probation. There were many staff people who never joined the *Guardian* collective. I assumed I would remain one of the outsiders.

I exploded. "Don't you have any women's solidarity!"

She ignored my outburst. "I'm a woman and I'm telling you, your position on the family is incorrect. I hope, after you study some more, you will agree with Irwin."

"Shit no!" And I turned to leave.

She took her parting shot. "Fine. If you want to cling to your bourgeois feminism, go ahead. But if you don't become a team player, you won't last long here."

That night after work I walked from the office to 11th street in record time. I was in the habit of taking 14th Street for the mile or so across town. It was a wide boulevard with lots of interesting import and discount store windows. Besides, 14th Street always offered the option of hopping on the

crosstown bus. That night, I had no intention of taking the bus. I needed to walk through my fury and fear. Would they fire me? What would I do, where would I go, if I had to leave the *Guardian*?

As I neared Union Square, a small box blew in front of me. Instinctively, I kicked it. It offered little resistance but enough to make me feel like I had accomplished something by sending it hurling some ten feet in front of me. I moved quickly towards it and kicked again. By the third kick, I approached the carton as if it were Irwin's head. I launched his head one more time before I crossed Third Avenue, finally able to smile for the first time in hours. The carton stayed intact for another few blocks. By the time we—me and Irwin's head—reached First Avenue, he was in pieces and gave up. I hurried, in triumph, down the last block to Avenue A, turned right again, quickened my pace past the darkened produce store, the bagel shop, the hardware store—three blocks of merchants who I was beginning to know. Home at last. For months after that, kicking Irwin's head across 14th Street became a ritual I performed to calm myself.

If I hadn't been so desperate to prove myself a worthy revolutionary, I might have noticed that my expulsion from the East Coast Prairie Fire Collective, the implosion of West Coast Prairie Fire and the Weather Underground into competing factions, the silence of the Black Liberation Army, the overthrow of Allende, the growing Sino-Soviet hostility, Irwin's pretenses at fulfilling the role of a 1970s Lenin and all the other wheel-spinning that plagued the left were symptoms of much more major shift in the structure of world power. Viet Nam had won, but would soon be invaded by China—Nixon's new ally. Despite our expectations, the Vietnamese victory and triumphs of national liberation movements in Laos, Cambodia, Angola and Mozambique did not bring the United States' Empire to its knees. We needed to adjust our strategy accordingly, but we had no idea how.

Before the next issue was typeset, Jack proposed a compromise that I accepted with relief. *The Guardian,* published the first two installments of my series on their "Forum" page, as op eds that the Guardian collective might disavow. The remaining five installments, that focused more on the sex segregated labor market and how the State policed women's oppression, were published as regular articles. In the end, I was happy to learn

that all seven articles became required reading in women's studies classes and groups across the country.

As the Brooklyn bound subway train rumbled through the tunnel, I poured over my notes from a phone call I had an hour earlier with a woman representing a campaign against "wife-battering." "One-third of all murders in the US happen in the home," she had declared, when I wondered aloud to her, "why have a campaign on that issue?"

I had no idea. Really, I had never thought about it. For nearly a decade I had proudly identified myself as a militant member of the women's movement. I had organized women's actions, taught Women's Studies and read most of what the women's movement had written—which included only an occasional passing reference to "wife-battering" or violence in the home.

In early December 1976, *The Guardian* received a press release about a "Speak-Out" that a group of neighborhood women were organizing against "wife-battering". Of course, I got the assignment, even though I knew nothing about the issue. I spent a couple of hours collecting background information, then grabbed my notes and headed towards Lexington Avenue to catch the train to Brooklyn. "In 1974, women filed 18,786 family offense petitions in New York State," I read as the train lunged to a stop at City Hall. Enough people rushed out so I could grab a seat before those headed for Brooklyn crammed in. I sat stunned, thinking about those 19,000 women, living under the same roof with men who beat them. "That's a lot of crazy masochists," I thought. My pace slowed as I approached the church where the Speak Out was happening. I wasn't looking forward to reporting on this gathering of sad, probably crazy, women. As I walked down the steps to the church basement, I checked my watch. I was a half hour late.

"That's right Sister!" I heard a woman yell. "You go, girl!" Another woman proclaimed loudly amidst laughter and clapping. When I took a seat in the back of the third concentric circle, I counted more than 100 women: about half Black, half white, mostly middle aged, a few might have been grandmothers, some wearing jeans and "stop the violence" t-shirts, some in dresses.

A white woman with a name tag that said "Jan, National Congress of Neighborhood Women," pointed to me, "This is Arlene Eisen. She's a reporter for *The Guardian*. I asked her to come because she has been writing good articles about women's issues. I thought we could trust her to get the word out about our movement. Does anyone object to her taking notes?"

A woman with her hair in a huge Afro, in her late forties perhaps, dressed in a white uniform, raised her hand. "Damn straight, I object. You people told me that no one would be taking names at this meeting. That we would be safe. If my ole man finds out I'm here....hell, if my boss finds out I'm here, they'll toss my ass out." A lot of women nodded their agreement. I found myself nodding along with them. Jan nodded too. "We hear you. We certainly don't want to do anything that jeopardizes your safety. Arlene has already agreed not to use anyone's name or the location of our meeting in her article. Right Arlene?" She paused.

"Definitely." I filled the silence with a too-eager-to-please-too-loud voice.

Jan continued, "So, is it ok if she stays and takes notes?"

"Cool, notes are cool. As long as there's no names and no tape recorder," the woman with the Afro persisted.

It was my turn to speak. "I have no recorder." I gestured as if preparing to be searched. "If I quote anyone, I'll only use first names and I'll make those up. No real names. I promise."

So began my journey towards learning defiance in the face of the silence, shame, terror, financial dependence and government indifference endured by battered women. In the course of the Speak Out, a debate emerged among the women about why they put up with being battered. A small minority blamed themselves. A white woman old enough to be my grandmother barely spoke above a whisper, "I chose a sick one for a husband." She lowered her head as tears streaked her face. Someone handed her a tissue. Then she murmured, "The fathers pass it on to their sons. I had to protect myself with a coffee pot against my 16-year old..."

"Sister. I feel you. But it's not your fault," Another Black woman with locks who was sitting next to her told her. Many others nodded their

agreement. I choked up. Woman after woman contributed their stories of beatings, rapes, mutilations. A younger white woman, expensively dressed in low heels, a skirt and blazer, could no longer stand the litany of horror stories and blurted out, "So why don't you call the police! I did."

A middle-aged white woman answered her, "I did too. They told me to kiss and make up. Like my husband had the right to slap me around."

A younger Black woman with long straight hair spoke in a rush of bitterness,

"I have three kids, but I finally, after months of trying, I got a court order that said if my husband didn't stay away, he'd be arrested immediately. He beat me again, when I filed divorce papers. So, I called the police and demanded his arrest. The damn cop refused. He had the nerve to say to me, 'You should work this thing out together. You've been taking this for a long time now. You'll get over it.' Then he left and my husband beat me unconscious."

Another spat out her experience with calling the police, "When the cop came to the house, he turned to my husband and cracked, 'Maybe if I beat my wife, she'd act right too.'"

I wrote furiously, as if these women's lives depended on my reporting exactly what they said, even though I knew better. After all, hadn't I taught and written about how the state relied on and re-enforced the patriarchal family? Now, when I came face-to-face with the reality of that theory, I tried to numb my pain and shock by writing obsessively. The woman with the Afro who first objected to my presence told her story:

"I'm fifty and have seven kids and there were times when I was beat and raped in my own house—sometimes with my silent consent." A number of women looked surprised that the woman who had been so assertive had also put up with a violent husband. She continued in a matter-of-fact tone, "Look. I had to eat. I had to pay rent. When you're married and in the house alone with seven kids and the man is the only one working, I'm depending on that man. I couldn't get a divorce til I got a job. I did that three years ago."

Everyone applauded, but she had more to say. "We're not talking about sickness here. We're not sick. This here..." She paused and pulled

up her sleeve so we could all see a jagged, raised scar running the length of her arm. I joined a chorus of "Oh's and Damn's." She concluded: "This here isn't about sickness. It's about money and power."

On the subway back to the *Guardian*, I eyed every man I saw, looking for tell-tale signs that he beat his wife. I wondered if it were possible for community organizations to defend women so they wouldn't feel their only recourse was to call the cops.

Chicago Bound (1977)

During the summer of 1976, my first vacation from the *Guardian,* I returned to San Francisco to regroup. Exhausted from dead-end political struggles with Irwin and his groupies, I was on the verge of quitting the *Guardian*. During an early morning jog I pondered how it was probably the first time in my life that I was taking the initiative in leaving a job. The thought of making a wrong move terrified me, especially since no one was recruiting me with a scholarship, a job, or a political project. My anxiety was compounded by my new status: I was no longer part of an organization that might give me direction.

At the free Blues Festival in McLaren Park, I ran into some people I had known from Viet Nam Vets against the War—Mike and his wife, Jill—and their friend, Janelle. Between acts they told me about how they were preparing to move, as a collective, to Chicago. They planned to get factory jobs and organize white workers into a Maoist group that was led by a Black man named Mike Dawson[14], the editor of a newspaper, *Seize the Time.* I had heard Dawson speak a few times and had convinced him to participate in the Hard Times Conference. To me, it seemed like he offered an alternative to Prairie Fire's endless flip flops—a way to support national liberation movements and working class struggles under direct leadership by people of color. I was intrigued and excited. I joined a political study group with Janelle, Jill and Mike, led by Dawson and Aiko, his wife. I had been calling myself a communist for years and had not set foot in a factory since my college days at Cornell's School of Industrial

14 Michael C. Dawson later became an award-winning professor at the University of Chicago who specialized in studying the intersection of class and race.

and Labor Relations. It was about time I learned first-hand what it's like to be a proletarian.

Haunted by my mother's frustration during the seven years I was married to Lincoln, I never considered having a child. According to my mother, a woman had to choose between a career and motherhood. "A good mother must stay at home for her kids," she intoned whenever she heard about an acquaintance who got a job outside the home. To me, it seemed she repeated this mantra to convince herself that her stymied ambition, her sacrifice to her children gave meaning to her life. I never bought it. My mother had skipped three grades and still graduated as her high school's valedictorian. "I was a prodigy," she sometimes declared wistfully. "At Hunter, I wanted to be a history major, but switched to accounting. It was more practical." Sylvia Eisen also secretly imagined herself as an actress. By the time I reached my teens, I understood that my mother had squandered her talents as a stay-at-home-mom and took her frustrations out on her children. "No," I promised myself. No one would trap me in motherhood."

Thus, I was surprised that as I approached my 35th birthday, the dam I had built against the deep reservoir of society's pressure to embrace the joys of motherhood began to crack. During the drive from San Francisco to Chicago with Janelle and her son, Maceo, for the first time, I enjoyed hanging out with a kid. At seven, Maceo was a bright, funny, beautiful biracial young man, with a generous spirit, eager to chip in with the chores of the trip. Janelle, invariably outspoken, blunt, and uncompromising in political meetings, became gentle, flexible and empathetic around Maceo. The palpable love and respect between them was nothing like my relationship with my mother.

At first, Maceo and I bonded around a shared disgust for Janelle's smoking. I had quit smoking years earlier. When I groaned as she lit her third cigarette since the last rest stop, she grudgingly extended her cigarette-holding arm out the window. Then Maceo chimed in. "Mom, you know they showed us pictures in school of a smoker's lungs. They looked all green and pukey. Please stop smoking. I don't want you to die." We were a great tag team. As the distance between us and Chicago short-

ened, an image of Maceo as my son implanted itself on the edge of my consciousness.

Janelle was not the only single mother I knew. During the Depression, Meridel LeSueur, raised two daughters on her own. At the same time, she marched on picket lines, became a best-selling novelist and, for a time, served on the Central Committee of the Communist Party USA. Lincoln had regaled me with stories of Meridel, a Bergman family legend. So, when I first met her at a family gathering in 1966, I expected to listen to her impart her wisdom to the circle gathered around her. Instead, she reached for my hand, and said,

"Here's Arlene. I'm so glad to finally meet you. I so admire your work."

I thought to myself, "My work? What have I done that this famous woman might notice, let alone admire?"

"I'm a loyal reader of your newspaper, *The Movement*," she explained. "I want to hear more about that last story you did..."

For the next 15 years, I visited Meridel every chance I got—including during the summer of 1977—sometimes staying at her home, sometimes traveling with her. As we camped in the Redwoods and drove through the deserts of California, Arizona and New Mexico, she incessantly remarked on the beauty of the land. "Slow down. You must see those hard working limbs. Look at those muscles," she marveled. "Oh, look at that mad old woman (a gnarled Joshua tree), slow down, you must see her."

During our travels, she insisted on her abiding faith in poor and working class people to create and fight for a better world. "*In the twenties, we never expected the upheaval of the thirties, in the fifties, we could not have dreamed of the sixties. Don't worry, the people will rise up again. All wounds return as warriors.*"

She also expounded on feminist parenting: "Don't worry whether you can be a good mother or if he'll be a good father. That's a linear, critical male way of thinking. Trust yourself, your strong body and learn from your children...We must steal the seeds of our children—steal the seeds, so our sons don't learn from their fathers to rape or invade other lands."

Our tiny Seize-the-Time Collective dribbled into Chicago in the fall of 1977. Janelle, her son Maceo, and I arrived in time for the first snowstorm of the season. Mike, and his wife, Jill, had already arrived and were staying at her parents' house in Cicero. We also planned to stay there until we found our own apartments. They were expecting us. Snow flurries coated the road, but Janelle had qualms about driving directly to Cicero—the infamous home of angry white mobs that stoned Martin Luther King a few years earlier. "It's still early," she suggested. "It won't be dark for at least three hours. Let's get a little look at Chicago before we head to Jill's parents."

"Cool with me," I agreed. "I'm not looking forward to hanging out in Cicero anyway. But maybe we should call them, just so they know when we'll get there."

Janelle balked. "I'd rather not call. If they know we're here, they'll insist on us going there immediately and frankly I don't want to subject Maceo to any backward bullshit. Who knows what their neighbors are like. It's better we arrive after dark."

Janelle maneuvered the car off Interstate 80, onto the Calumet Expressway, and headed north, while I studied the map. She made a sudden turn onto an exit before I caught its name. We drove for a while on a broad street lined with run down buildings, vacant lots, dollar stores, liquor stores, churches, BBQ shacks and storefronts labeled "currency exchange." Alone and in groups, Black people hurried in and out of those storefronts with their collars up and heads down against the frigid wind. By the time we passed the third currency exchange, I figured out that they cashed checks and didn't exchange dollars for foreign currency. I searched for a street sign. "Janelle, do you have any idea where we are?"

"I don't know the name of the street, but we must be in occupied Black Nation territory. Do you realize we've been driving for 15 minutes and, except for the cop cars, we haven't passed a white person yet!" I shared her delight—not just with her humor, but also with arriving at a place so different from San Francisco.

I had decided not to live with the rest of the collective—mostly because I did not want to live with a married couple. Also, I never found a way to bridge the cultural distance between my New York Jewish alienation and Jill and Mike's Midwest Catholic "normality." I easily found a wood-paneled three-room apartment in a white working-class neighborhood on the Northside—just south of Uptown. After the cramped one-room studio on the Lower East Side of New York and camping out on friends' living room couches, it felt luxurious. I relished lining the living room walls with my books and being able to pace from one room to the next.

I underestimated the loneliness of living by myself, in a city where I knew only a handful of people. I especially had no way of anticipating the dread of feeling trapped alone in an apartment by howling wind, snow, and a windchill factor of minus 10 degrees. In San Francisco, months and months passed without my switching on the small black and white TV I owned. That winter in Chicago, when the black and white set died, I braved sub-zero temperatures to replace it with a used color TV set that very day.

I had a crush on Janelle, but never acted on it. Janelle was blond and not classically beautiful. Tall, lean, sharp—She easily drew on a vocabulary that out-performed any English professor, although she never went to college. She was an over-qualified legal secretary, former speed addict and currently a very heavy drinker. We talked a lot on our cross-country drive but she was never very explicit about her political past and I didn't question her. From time to time, she would mention an old friend who had been in the Prisoners' Union and close to George Jackson or something she did with the Venceremos Organization, a splinter off of a Marxist-Leninist tree that ideologically supported armed struggle. In those days, we all argued for armed struggle, but for most, the commitment was never tested.

Months later, after I had been living with my new lover and we had attempted to incorporate him into our collective, he remarked about Janelle, "She looks like a woman who has killed someone. You can see it in her eyes." Shortly after, I repeated this remark to Janelle. I had ex-

pected her to laugh her raspy laugh and dismiss his remark. Instead, she responded evenly, "You mean it shows." I did not take the conversation further but thought about it whenever she drank too much. One night we went to hear some blues at a juke joint on the near-North side. That night, Janelle drank until she couldn't stand.

"Let's go," I ordered. "I'll help you get to the car." She looked bewildered, and didn't protest. I hoisted her arm around my neck to lift her off the seat. When the table no longer blocked the view below her waist, I gasped in disgust. She had peed in her pants. "Damn, Janelle," I muttered. I don't think she heard me. I spread some newspaper over the passenger seat of my car and she seemed to doze as I drove her home. That was the end of my crush.

At our next collective meeting I tried to talk about her drinking. "Janelle, I'm worried about your health," I said quietly before the meeting started. I guess Mike and Jill had already tried a similar approach because Janelle immediately snapped back. "Why the fuck you all worried about my health. I'm fine. I'm strong as an ox. Worry about your own damn health."

I backed off and felt like I had lost my only real woman friend in Chicago.

Although we all planned to get factory jobs, we found nothing listed in the classified ads. We needed pay checks right away. Jill and Janelle easily found work as secretaries. A missionary organization that served inmates in Cook County Jail hired both of them without checking their references. Because of my graphic arts experience with laying out the *Movement* newspaper, I landed a job in a tiny factory, Delta Nameplate, that made metal labels for machinery. Day after day, I gripped the T-square and triangle and squinted to outline rectangles with a precision that met the .025 inch tolerance requirements. Fumes from the cutting room wafted into our graphics room, mixing freely with the exhaled smoke from the two chain smoking women of our crew. Every day, I left work with a headache. Daily I consoled myself, "I'm gonna leave this job as soon as I find a better one in a unionized factory."

When our collective met, their exhaustion with pulling double shifts

as parents and workers prevented us from discussing how we might implement the latest advice from our leader, Dawson, who was back in California. I interrupted their banter about grocery shopping and dish washing schedules. "I need to talk about the women at the place where I work. They're all white, and all poor. I earn $4.25 an hour and my supervisor makes only $6.00. But they're all Republicans, proud to be living in white segregated neighborhoods."

Janelle snapped at me. "Well, you're living in an all-white neighborhood too, Arlene. You can't hold that against them. Chicago is the most segregated city in the country. Either you stay in a white neighborhood or you become a white colonist invading the Black nation."

I countered: "But I don't sprinkle my daily conversation with 'n****r this' and 'sp*c that' the way they do, constantly insulting the men—all Black and Brown—in the production room, where they cut steel with acid, the real work. So, tell me Janelle, how do you think I should engage in a conversation about our exploitation, let alone white supremacy or Soviet social imperialism?"

Janelle shrugged, and stretched her cup-holding arm towards Mike who had opened a bottle of vodka. He poured and Jill passed each of us a wedge of her delicious German black forest chocolate cake. "Both of you need to chill," Jill sighed. "Besides, you've already said you ain't gonna stay there, Arlene. So why stress? You should think about getting a job where we are. We have such a good time there, it hardly feels like work." Then Jill and Janelle competed with each other to tell the most poignant stories about the various inmates they were meeting at the Cook County Jail. We were all steeped in George Jackson and Black Panther ideology that insisted the "lumpen"—those who often landed in jail—were the most revolutionary class.

"Maybe it's fun," I remarked. "But we made a commitment to Dawson to establish ourselves in a big factory. You know, build trust, organize white workers against racism."

Janelle took a long swig of vodka. "Sure you're right. But, for now, we need to pay the bills and working at the Jail has its advantages. We're learning a lot about the Chicago scene."

Our debate continued over several weeks. Meanwhile, the holidays

were approaching and the jailhouse missionaries planned a Christmas party for the inmates. They continued a tradition of inviting community members. Jill and Janelle insisted I attend the party. I decided to go, only with the intention of gathering more information to bear on my arguments for them to quit their secretarial work and look harder for factory jobs.

I deliberately chose a baggy long skirt and loose-fitting sweater to wear to the party. I hid my breasts under my favorite Mexican shawl woven in blue, purple and green wool. With boots coming up to my knees, no skin showed below my chin. I arranged my long brown hair the way I wore it everyday: in a clip at the base of my neck and then twisted so that it fell below my shoulder on one side.

I drove slowly towards Cook County Jail. It was snowing. When I arrived, Jill and Janelle were behind a table piled with supermarket cookies, hot apple cider and kool-aid punch. The day room was already crowded with inmates, their wives, mothers, and girlfriends. I waved to Janelle from the hallway, but didn't attempt to make my way through the crush of people. Instead, I dawdled in the hallway, waiting for the crowd to thin out.

Someone had passed me a Styrofoam cup full of warmed cider. I busied myself with a careful study of the cup. I rationed sips, to make sure not to empty the cup too soon—a skill I had developed in my adolescent wall flower days. A familiar self-conscious feeling returned. I did not belong there. I was not popular. I argued silently with myself: *You're thirty-five years old, not fourteem. You've been married, divorced, traveled the world and had more affairs with men and women than you can count. Don't be silly. This is the seventies—not the fifties. Women's liberation has abolished wallflowerism.* But the feeling stayed, even after a tall, dark-skinned man with beautifully chiseled high cheekbones, and large black oval-shaped eyes—the eyes of a hypnotist, approached me. His ironic smile eclipsed the tinsel merriment of the jail party.

"How ya doin'?" Before I could answer, he continued, "My name is Charles but they call me BG." He was wearing an inmate's uniform of blue denim. I noticed a crudely-drawn "BG" tattooed midway between his thumb and index finger on the top of his hand. He stood tall, with

broad shoulders and perfect posture that suggested royalty. Rather than give him any name, I asked what the B.G. stood for.

"It used to stand for Black Gangster, then Black General. Now it's Black Guerrilla," he recounted. Was he real? I wondered if he belonged to a Chicago cell of the Black Liberation Army. I knew better than to break security by asking him about BLA membership. Instead, I half seriously asked, "How did you go from gangster to guerrilla?"

"That's a long story. And this is not the time or place for it." Smiling, he switched up. "Tell me how you came to celebrate Christmas at Cook County Jail?"

Still, without giving my name, I told him the truth, although abbreviated. I was new to Chicago, had moved there with some friends, two of whom worked at the Jail. They insisted I come to this party. As I answered his question, I scolded myself, "No way, Arlene, will you get involved with a man, much less one with a prison sentence."

As if he had heard my thoughts, he remarked, "Well, I thought I would be outta here by Christmas. They dropped all the charges. But some red tape is keeping me here. I'm sure to be out by New Years. Maybe we could get together after I'm out."

I sidestepped the suggestion. "So how do you spend your time in here?"

"I write. Mostly poetry. I just finished one about Brother Malcolm X."

I inhaled and exhaled, deeper and more slowly than usual, trying to suppress my interest. I blurted anyway, "Let me hear it." I was no longer making small talk with a man I thought I would never see again. I recognized that I wanted to know more about this man who wrote political poetry and might even be a revolutionary. A comrade.

"Sorry. I haven't memorized it. But if you give me your address, I'll mail you a copy."

"I thought visitors were not supposed to pass anything to the inmates. Won't you get in trouble?" I asked.

"Just tell me your address. I'll remember it." He touched me lightly on the arm.

"3822 North Janssen. Apartment 2W. The zip is 60013. If you forget it, ask Jill or Janelle for it." He smiled again and repeated the address.

"Allriiiight," he accented the second syllable as if it were in a blues song. "And your name?"

"Arlene."

He repeated it, pronouncing it without the r. "Ahhlene?" And he took my hand and shook it slightly, as if we had just been introduced.

"Yes. But it's spelled a-r-l-e-n-e."

Then he asked the stock question, "You got a man?"

Disappointed, I pulled my hand away from his. I paused, tempted to launch a lecture on feminist ideology, but decided it could wait. I wondered, should I declare, "no one owns me." Or should I tell this BG character, "I'm not available." I settled on "No, not in the usual sense."

Charles nodded, smiled.

Three days later, a letter addressed to "Ms. Arlene_____" from "General Charles Martin #7709372 G-1" arrived in my mailbox. The letter filled eight pages of a 5.5 by 8-inch pad. Each word landed in exactly the same place on the line, as if a ruler had blocked any deviation. It began,

"As-Salaam-Alaikum. Arlene, I think I know where your head is at. I thought about you last night back in my cell, after the party. You asked a lot of questions, but the one that dance on the screen in the back of my mind the most was when you ask me were we comrades in here. We are more than comrades. We are brothers first, because we are the sons of a people—paralyzed prisoners of a system of slow death that should be called hell and bondage...."

On the last page, he abruptly switched tone, *"Arlene, these next lines are for you...you are the music while the music lasts, an incantation of hints and guesses."*

And he closed by paraphrasing, but not crediting, George Jackson: *"We will battle until the enemy blood rise to the horse brow. The one and only way to uproot the devil oppressor is by force."* Then signed, *"General Charles—Adullah Muhammad."* And on the last line, *"My number is 7709372G."*

As I bent over his letter, concentrating hard, trying to figure out the meaning of his often incomprehensible prose, the tension in my neck grew. Although I was alone in my apartment, involuntarily, "ahhhhhh" came out, as if I was about to start a conversation about this intriguing letter with someone in the next room.

First Date (1978)

I sat at the typewriter, poised to answer Charles' first letter, not sure how to begin, then opted for direct, not diplomatic language.

December 21, 1977. "...Virtually everyone I asked has a pretty low opinion of the organization you mentioned. They say it rips off the community, terrorizes those who refuse to pay, tries to control the drug trade for its own purposes and is easily manipulated by the police and state...If they're wrong, please explain to me how..."

His answer began:

December 26, 1977."... Yes, I was involved at one time in a lot of negative bullshit, like drugs among other things. It seem like so long ago... I will not use the ghetto as an excuse to illuminate the fact that I was simply unresponsive to the needs of the Black community. Which I was a part of. When I realize what was happening around me I was like a virgin child in a land of hostiles populated by savage dicks ready to rape a thousand time. I was a disgusting unexcusing enemie of my own people."

I exhaled hard at the word "disgusting." It sounded sincere, but then he meandered into a stream of metaphors that seemed designed to drown reality. Yet I chose to ignore his apparent ambivalence, confusion, despair and occasional insincerity. Instead, I decided to continue challenging his politics. After all, wasn't political struggle the absolute requirement for a healthy relationship? In my second letter I tried to explore his views on relationships and women.

My words were a blunt response to his plea not to judge his life. It

was New Year's Eve. I wrote quickly. I had a date with Janelle and a couple of men from my work. I didn't want to keep them waiting.

December 31, 1977. "...Every relationship I've ever had with a man or woman—friendship or lover—if it had any meaning—was based on our working together, struggling together to destroy this system, including the prison system...

"I like you, but frankly it freaks me out because I don't trust you. You seem like the kind of man who tries to control women. You talk a lot about yourself, but don't ask me about me. I don't want to re-live any hell [from my past or from yours] with you. I hope you don't want to relive it either."

I ended all my letters to him with what I intended to be a cool, "take care."

I looked forward to an answer that would convince me to stop all contact with him or help me relax and enjoy the adventure ahead. His reply did neither, even though he wrote what he understood I wanted to hear.

January 4, 1978. "...Personally, I don't like obsequious women, Black or white. I do not try to control women because I have found out that sometimes it could be dangerous. I also realize that man is the cause of most of the problems of the world....It also saddens me that you don't trust me.....I value my principles and beliefs, but I also respect yours. When I choose a woman, we shall be the base and foundation of the movement. We shall struggle as one, live and die as one, after us, many shall follow in our name. We are few, but we will fight as many....whatever decision you come to is totally up to you."

I refolded the letter but before I placed it in the pile of his letters that I had been saving along with carbon copies of my replies, I re-read the previous one. While the handwriting appeared the same, the style, syntax, and clarity made me laugh with the thought: I wonder if his tier-mates keep a file of form letters they send to feminist women. I didn't answer him. Why bother, I thought. I wanted to trust him, but his words on the page sounded hollow, a turn off.

Meanwhile, another letter arrived.

January 11, 1978. "...I seek not to weaken, but to strengthen your revo-

lutionary zeal. However, tonight, I come as a man who's only desire is to love and be loved, not with the sounds of discord beating in the night. I want no talk of racism or inequality to mar this night. Let the guns, if they must, sound tomorrow, let the bloodthirsty beasts of capitalism and all its evils lie quiet in this night, while you and I make love...Enough! How have you been? I take it from your silence you have been quite busy? It would ease the strain if you would respond to this one."

I answered Charles, or whatever his name was, with a waterfall of words.

January 15, 1978. "...You ask how I am. The answer is 'up' and 'down'." I went on to describe in detail the frustrations of my job, my plans for taking a drafting course and my enjoyment of a poetry reading by Ntozake Shange and ended with *"I look forward to meeting you again in three dimensions. Take care. Arlene"*

His last letter, dated January 21, 1978, did not arrive until after Charles walked out the gates of Cook County Jail, the day he called me. I had just pulled off my slush-soaked boots when the phone rang.

"Hello?" Although the heater in the apartment blasted, I was still shivering.

"Ahlene. Is that you?"

I recognized his voice at once, but answered, "Yes, who's this?" I hated when a man assumed I would recognize his voice as if he was the only man who ever called.

"It's Charles. Look Ahlene. I'm out. When can I see you?"

I hesitated. It was a Thursday night. I had to go to work early the next morning. "Maybe Friday night," I suggested.

"Damn woman. Why you wanna make me wait that long! Look, Ahlene, you have nothing to fear from me."

"I know. It's not fear of you. It's just that I have to get up for work at six tomorrow." I suppressed my excitement.

"No problem. Let's just meet for dinner. Then you can go home and get your rest."

My resistance evaporated. We agreed to meet in the parking lot of

the Chicken Shack on 43rd and Vincennes. He had told me to look for a black Impala. I told him I drove a beat-up yellow Datsun with California plates. I dressed in the same outfit I wore to the Christmas Party and headed towards the Southside on the icy February roads. I slowed when I spotted a crude drawing of a man holding a hatchet chasing a chicken on a sign that, at first, appeared as an island in a sea of vacant lots. The image of David Berkowitz, the Son of Sam serial killer, jumped into my mind and loomed behind the sign.

My lightweight Datsun skidded on an ice patch, adding to my nervousness, as I pulled into the parking lot and noticed the black Impala. Charles was not alone. Another man was in the driver's seat and two women were in the back. Still in a skid, I braked slowly before I could maneuver my car next to his. Before I turned off the ignition, he was at the door with the two women at his side. I tried to hide my disappointment that we would spend our first date in a group. I decided not to get out of the car and hug him as I had fantasized. Rather I rolled down the window. The women took a few steps back so Charles could speak to me privately.

"You made it, Ahlene. I'm glad you're here. For a minute I thought you wouldn't show and then I would have dragged these sistahs out here in this cold for no reason." He then introduced me to the women with him.

"This is Loretta. This is Ruby. Would you mind if they searched you? Nuthin personal—standard procedure. You know the Black Guerrilla Army has its rules."

I relaxed a bit. This man really might be a comrade after all. The image of the women sentries searching us before they allowed us to enter the Weatherman Convention popped into my head. For years I had gone to Black Panther Party events where they searched our purses and sometimes patted us down before we entered the hall. A precaution in the days when nearly 100 Panthers had been murdered by police—both uniformed and undercover. Without hesitation, I responded,

"Sure, no problem. But it's kinda cold to take off my coat here."

"That won't be necessary. Just let them pat you down and then sit down in the back seat of the car, and take off your boots so they can check them."

"Yes, of course." I mumbled obediently.

Loretta and Ruby proceeded with their task. Loretta muttered an apology as she ran her hand quickly over my breasts. I wondered how she thought she would find a concealed weapon under the layers of my heavy winter parka and sweater. Too quickly, they declared me clean and returned to the Impala. Charles announced, "We'll use your car." as his comrades drove off. Relieved, but confused that the search was so perfunctory, I asked,

"Any ideas about where we should go?"

"I know a juke joint a few blocks west of here. Take a left."

I liked that he didn't seem to mind a woman in the driver's seat and never asked to drive my car. But as I pulled up next to a car stopped at a red light, he instructed me to back up a little so the driver of the other car wouldn't have a clear shot at us as we waited for the light to turn green. "Park here," he pointed to our destination, which appeared to be a darkened store front. With his arm around my waist, he guided me through the door. We entered a small, dark room that looked like a tiny liquor store. The man behind the counter smiled.

"Hey BG. What up, man."

"I'm good. Very good. How ya doing Orestes?" Orestes stared at me. "Oh, sorry Orestes, I didn't introduce you to my wife. Ahlene, this is Orestes. Orestes, this is Ahlene."

"Wife!" I smiled and nodded, controlling an impulse to protest. Charles asked the man behind the counter for a bottle of cognac. Orestes handed Charles a small bottle wrapped in a brown paper bag and two paper cups.

"That's on the house, tonight, BG."

I was impressed that the local store owner welcomed Charles this way. I asked myself, was this the Southside Chicago version of Mao prescribing that revolutionaries be like fish swimming in the water of the people, protected by the community?

"Thanks man. Thanks," he called to the man, as he led me to a smaller room behind the front one, where three or four tables were arranged on either side of a juke box.

"Why did you say I'm your wife?," I blurted. I didn't even believe in marriage.

"Easy. Easy. It's just a respect thing. You notice any other white women here? The only white women who come to places like this are hookers. I wanted Orestes and the other men here to know you're not a hooker."

We settled into the only vacant chairs. Donny Hathaway was singing:

"...But we're alone now and I'm singing this song to you"

"I like this song," I remarked and glanced around, noticing there was no room to dance. Charles nodded and also scanned the space. Although the music wasn't blasting, it was difficult to talk without the people at the next table hearing us. He seemed preoccupied.

I'm hungry as a hog. I haven't eaten since this morning."

"Me too. Is there any place around here that serves food this time of night?"

"Let's not stay on the Southside," he suggested. "Let's find something near your place."

"What kind of food do you like?" I asked. "Anything is cool," then he added, "as long as the place won't be full of white folks." In fact, I had never seen any Black people in restaurants near where I lived.

"We can eat at my place." I surprised myself with the suggestion. Still, it seemed like the only place we would both be comfortable. It had begun to snow again. If I thought about what we might do after dinner, I don't remember. Did he expect me to drive him back down to the Southside after we ate? That would be an extra hour drive, going and coming in the fresh snow. Usually, I planned for such logistics. But not that night.

After we ate leftover lasagna and salad, we stayed at the kitchen table, drinking wine and laughing about the missionaries at Cook County Jail. It felt like a celebration of our meeting that defied all odds. I listened with fascination to his story. His grandfather, Daddy Cane, was a proud landowner, a civic leader in the tiny town Mound Bayou, Mississippi. When he lost his land to debt and taxes, he fled to Chicago, penniless, rather than eke out a living as a sharecropper under the constant threat of lynch mobs.

Daddy Cane died soon after they arrived in Chicago and left his wife, Mama Clemmie, a widow with five children and no home or savings. Charles said little about his own parents, only that his mother abandoned his father, him and his sisters before they arrived in Chicago and that Mama Clemmie ended up raising her own kids, her grandkids—including Charles—and her great grandkids. Charles dropped out of school early, joined the Disciples, got caught up in 'the Life' and was finally rescued by the Nation of Islam—where the leadership recruited and trained him to serve in the elite security force for Elijah Muhammad: the Fruit of Islam.

"There I studied the Arts, got a black belt and learned to walk tall."

"Arts?"

"Martial Arts. But two years ago, Bilal, my closest comrade in the Fruits fired five bullets at point blank range into my chest. I got the scars to prove it." He traced a line over his sweater from his sternum to his belt.

"What!" I blurted. At that point, I didn't mind him doing most of the talking. I wanted to hear every detail.

"They told Mama Clemmie I would not live. But, after a few weeks, I made it off the critical list. Then the doc told me I would never walk again. I proved that cracka wrong."

His obviously powerful will impressed me. This man would challenge me. There was nothing passive about him. Moreover, unlike most white men, his self-confidence didn't seem to depend on a sense of entitlement or on keeping other people down.

I had so many questions—starting with why his mother left, and why his friend shot him. He talked about it all so matter-of-factly. I assumed somehow he had resolved these traumas—had not succumbed to paranoia. It seemed premature to question him about these betrayals. Instead, I asked him about his leg.

"Oh, I thought I noticed a slight limp when you walk. Is that why?"

"Yes. There's a bullet that still presses on the nerve that controls the way I hold my foot." He raised his glass to toast.

"But, no matter. Here I am with you, tonight, Ahlene. And I've gone on too long about my life. I want to hear everything about you."

He encouraged me to talk about Viet Nam and San Francisco and my reasons for coming to Chicago. He seemed very interested in everything I said. We talked for a long time. I was afraid when we stopped talking, he would ask me to drive him home. Instead, I heard,

"Is it ok if I kiss you?"

"I'm so glad you asked."

Westwind, Unify Us (1978)

I called in sick to work every day for a week. But I never felt better. The electricity of Charles' touch gave me a new power, a sense of my own beauty and magic. In the shower, as I lathered my arms, breasts and spaces between them, I both recognized the familiar feel of my own skin and the new beauty it radiated now that Charles had claimed it.

But on the Monday we had agreed I would return to work and he would return to the Southside. I was paralyzed by a throbbing pain that radiated in all directions from my right labia. Charles kept asking what he could do. I had no idea. When the need to pee forced me out of bed, I hobbled to the bathroom, with my hands at my crotch attempting to hold the labia apart. If I believed in a vengeful puritan god it would have been easy to assume that he was punishing me and Charles for our sins.

I had no health insurance or cash to pay for a doctor. Besides, even the thought of dressing and driving to the doctor's office tightened the grip of pain. Luckily, I was able to reach an empathetic gynecologist on the phone. After questioning me at length, the doctor speculated the condition was caused by an abscessed Bartholin Gland. He ordered me to soak in a tub as hot and as long as I could stand it. Charles volunteered to fill the tub.

"This should do it." He announced proudly, relieved that he could help. "Ahhhh." Abruptly, I withdrew my red hand. "It's scalding. Please add some cold." Finally, with the concentration of a mother giving her newborn baby her first bath, Charles blended exactly the right balance of hot and cold. "Yeah. Thank you. That's it," as I eased into the water. I

beamed with appreciation as the heat of the water eased the pain. I never expected my new lover to be so nurturing.

"Ya want company?" Charles asked.

I winced, glancing around the tub, horrified at the image of squeezing my legs close enough to accommodate another person. "There's no room in here."

He laughed. "Christ no. I mean, if you want, I won't go back to the Southside today. I can stay here, in case you need something."

I nodded gratefully. "That would be wonderful." I realized that I had been dreading his departure for the Southside.

As I leaned back in the steamy water and draped one leg over the side of the tub, Charles settled on the only seat in the room, the toilet seat.

"You know, the last time I was in this kind of pain was the day I landed in Cuba with an impacted wisdom tooth. They immediately took me to the hospital, and from then on, I had never felt so well cared for. And it didn't cost me a dime."

Charles reached for a towel, rolled it up and wedged it between his back and the wall. Then he laughed, trying to make a joke of his cynicism. "Ya think those commies gave you the royal treatment to soften you up for their brainwashing?"

I winced. This man—whose every move promised he would be a gentle, supportive lover, tuned to my physical, emotional, intellectual and, yes, political needs—sounded like an average right-wing jerk. I firmly believed the axiom: strong relationships require political unity. Even so, I couldn't bring myself to give up on this man who had made me feel so beautiful. I had no choice but to persevere in my mission to rid him of his anti-communism.

"Absolutely not!" I snapped. "All medical care in Cuba is socialized. Free for everyone. And all the medical and dental schools are free. No one makes a profit off of health care. They believe it's a human right."

"So who pays?" He challenged.

I reached to add more hot water, and asked, "You really want to know?" Before I launched a lecture on socialist political economy, I needed to make sure he wanted to hear it.

He nodded. "I ain't goin' nowhere."

As those hours of soaking stretched to days, Charles listened to my stories about Cuba, Viet Nam and anything else I could think of that might convince him to share my revolutionary optimism. It hadn't taken me long to realize he was no Panther or member of the Black Liberation Army. Yet, I was sure that only a lack of information prevented him from making a full revolutionary commitment.

After three days of soaking and talking, I wasn't sure how much I had changed Charles' way of thinking, but the throbbing pain between my legs eased. During our time in that bathroom, he had talked a lot about his grandmother. He repeated often that he wanted me to meet her. Mamma Clemmie's children and grandchildren and great-grands usually gathered at her home on Sundays. Everyone, regardless of generation, called her Mama. So, on the first Sunday I was able to dress, I suggested we take a trip to the Southside.

Mamma Clemmie was a frail, short woman. She lived in a drafty house that had no central heat and limited electricity. There was no stove in the kitchen, only a hotplate that was stuck on the highest setting. Chucky, Charles' severely disabled cousin who was 16, but still in diapers, rocked in the corner of the front room. Charles fretted that his grandmother might hurt herself when she lifted Chucky to change his diaper, even with the help of his blind great-aunt Slu.

Gingerly, I shook Mama Clemmie's bony hand, feeling like any pressure might break her finger joints. The combination of her toothless slur and my inexperience with rural Mississippi conversation made me struggle to understand her. Did she say "her family was in slavery" or "her family escaped from slavery"? I had no idea how to respond, except I hoped she would see my appreciative nod and smile. Charles noticed my dilemma, put his arm around my shoulder and offered a translation.

"She says she remembers slavery days. She was just a child, but she remembers. She wants you to know she is proud her family is still together after all these years. She says, welcome to the family." I nodded, smiled and thought about how I might hug her without hurting her brittle bones. I calculated that she could be as old as 100 years, when Charles explained that her father escaped from slavery and her mother

was a member of the Pawnee Nation. Charles' sister, Jean, arrived a few minutes later. She brought her three kids, two two-liter bottles of coke, a pack of paper cups and a large bag of chips. She had the same broad smile and dancing almond eyes as Charles. He had cautioned me to stay away from Jean, so soon after she sat down, I offered to make a run to the Chicken Shack a few blocks away.

During the whole time it took me to get the chicken and return, I marveled at how Mamma Clemmie managed to raise three generations of Martin children. Later, Pam, one of her great granddaughters, told me, "She never talked very much, she seemed to always be thinking about something, so when she did tell us something, we knew it had to be serious."

Not long after, back on the Northside with the wind chill factor, it was below zero. But inside the apartment, steam heat blasted out of control. We might as well have been on a tropical island with no air conditioning. Nina Simone sang from the stereo in the living room while I mashed avocados for guacamole in the kitchen. Charles wrestled a cork out of the bottle of Almaden Chablis. It was more than a month after our first date. He had never returned to sleep in the Southside. I made space in my closet for his clothes, emptied one drawer in my dresser and another in my desk for his stuff. I even squeezed a poster of Marcus Garvey between the ones featuring Vietnamese women on the living room wall. Without a word about arrangements, commitments or conditions, we each behaved as if we had decided to set up housekeeping together.

I looked up from the mixing bowl and gazed at Charles' chest—more specifically, I fixed on that inch-wide scar that ran down his chest. "You mentioned it before, but tell me more about how this happened?"

With his long neck bent forward, he glanced at his chest. "You mean this?"

"It was on my birthday a coupla years ago. October 29, 1975. I can't ever forget that date. We was at my mother-in-law's. Bettye, my ex-wife, Patrice and Pam, my kids, we're all there. Ready to celebrate—with cake, candles and all. They were in the front room. I went to the kitchen in the back to get something to drink."

He paused, filled his glass with wine, took a gulp, gazed out the window at the bare winter trees and filled a glass for me. Then he resumed.

"In a flash, Bilal—my man, my brother, tight for years, we trained for the Fruits together—he crashed through the back door and shot me. Bamm, bamm, bamm…Shot me five times."

"Oh my god," I murmured.

Charles took another gulp of wine.

"When I came to, I was in the hospital. You know the rest, Ahlene."

Then he looked at me hard. His expression seemed caught between a playful smile and a prosecutor's interrogation. Some of the wine in my glass splattered as he reached for my shoulders, playfully shook me and whispered.

"Can I trust ya, Ahlene, or are ya gonna do me like Bettye and Bilal did?"

He had more reason to distrust me than I did to distrust him. My mind raced but I continued to sway with the music. Did I dare ask him about why his then-wife would conspire with his would-be killer? Who was this Bilal? Was he still on the loose? Was he still trying to kill Charles? Would he track Charles to my place? What about his kids? How old were they? Were they safe?

Yet, without hesitation or any reassurance that we were not in danger, I silently resolved to winning his trust. I took up the challenge—not only to prove that I respected him as a comrade, but also to prove he could trust me as a lover. His reluctance dared me to demonstrate my political integrity as well as my physical irresistibility. In the course of seducing him, I seduced myself. When he finally let go and called my name, I felt more creative, beautiful, intelligent, militant, important, powerful and beloved than I had ever felt before. With Charles I learned the exquisite, fleeting ecstasy of full surrender in lovemaking—and mistook that bliss for love itself.

Graveyard Shift Blues (1978)

After Charles moved in, my job at Delta Nameplate became no more tolerable. No matter where our lovemaking may have transported me at night, during the day, I was still trapped with the nauseating mixture of cigarette smoke and fumes. What was the point of bending over a light table all day tracing tiny rectangles with co-workers who proudly proclaimed their allegiance to the Republican Party and planned to quit the job as soon as they married? It was a political dead end. Working there made me feel wretched, useless. Every night I scoured the want ads, hoping to find another job—a real proletarian job, in a large factory.

In late February, when the snow halted all but emergency traffic, Pam, a woman I knew from my *Women of Viet Nam* book tour, called me about a job possibility. Her boyfriend in the Steelworkers' Union heard that in order to keep a government contract, Danly Machine Corporation had to comply with new affirmative action guidelines and integrate its 1500 male employees with at least a few women.

Pam and I agreed to meet in a Near Northside café the next evening. Our thick parkas and scarves padded our hug. Her short straight light brown hair settled neatly just below her ears as she unwound her scarf. Like most working class white feminists in the mid 1970s, she wore no make-up, jeans and a baggy sweater. Yet, her polite blue eyes and constant smile made me imagine her as an obedient farmer's daughter rather than a rebel. How wrong I was. Pam was one of the founders of the Minneapolis/St Paul Women's Union and an exuberant organizer of the anti-war movement. After the War was over, she was one of the few who I could

count on to continue raising money for reconstructing Viet Nam. When she first called to say she had moved to Chicago, I was delighted.

Before we ordered our coffee, she continued where her phone call had left off about Danly. "They're so hard up for women machinists, they're not checking our work experience. They just give you a test to make sure you can read a micrometer and blueprints," she announced as she pointed out the listing in *Chicago Tribune's* classified section. I was skeptical.

"What kind of machines are you talking about? The only machines I've ever been near are the kickpresses that make covered buttons. When I was a kid my father forced me to work when he had a garment center deadline he couldn't meet without help." I frowned at the childhood memory of smashing thousands of pronged metal disks together with little circles of cloth to make those buttons.

"Arlene. You're not kidding are you? You really don't know what machinists do? They don't run just any kind of machine. And man, would they be pissed if they heard you. Machinists are very proud of their craft. They're highly skilled workers who run the kind of machines—mostly lathes and milling machines—that cut steel and other metals."

"Oh. Sorry." I was afraid to let her know I had no idea what a lathe or milling machine looked like, although I had a vague memory that when we took Home Economics in high school, the boys ran lathes in the machine shop. "You say, they'll hire us without, uh," I paused, not knowing the correct terminology, "if we just pass those tests—even if we never ran a lathe?"

She nodded. "That's what I said."

Pam had already passed the tests. She grabbed my hand and squeezed it.

"I begin work at Danly next week. It would be great to work there together."

I took a sip of coffee and imagined leaving Delta Nameplate and working with someone who was a comrade. "Sounds good." I was beginning to share her enthusiasm.

Pam pulled a small rounded metal object out of her purse. It looked

like a delicate clamp. "Try it. It's a micrometer." She handed it to me. I held it by the clamp part and had no idea what to do next. So, she demonstrated by clamping the thing around the spoon. She passed the micrometer back to me. I twisted it so the two ends gripped the top of my pen, while she explained how to read the numbers on the side to the fourth decimal point.

"The pen top is 0.0252" wide," I announced after squinting to decipher the placement of the tiny lines and numbers.

"Let me see. No check again. You rounded off wrong."

"Correction, that's 0.0253." Then Pam continued with her instructions,

"Good. You see how easy it is to read a micrometer. That's half the skill you'll need to become a machinist's helper. The other half is harder. Reading blueprints. Here's the book I borrowed from the library to help me pass the test. Study it. When you think you can read a blueprint, go to the Laramie Street entrance of the plant, ask for the personnel office. Bring some names of factories where you've worked in New York or San Francisco."

I protested. "But I have no factory experience at all—not since I was six anyway, working with my Dad or when I spent the summer after my sophomore year on a student exchange program in an appliance factory in Bilbao, Spain."

"Don't worry. Make something up. They don't check. I promise. But go down there soon. Once they fill their quota, they'll slam the door in any woman's face."

I spent weeks pouring over the how-to-read-blueprints book. Finally, if I turned the book upside down or folded the page into a tent shape, I could recognize the view the drawing was depicting. At least the drawings in Chapter One. The drawings in Chapter Two made my eyes glaze over. Time was running out. Pam had called to say if I didn't apply right away, I might as well forget it.

A short walk from the next-to-last El stop before the end of the train line at the Cicero border, the enormous Danly Machine Corporation plant occupied at least two square blocks. Pam had told me the plant enjoyed a reputation for manufacturing high-quality, one-of-a kind machine tools.

The work would be less tedious than assembly-line operations. It also meant that most of the workers there—skilled craftsmen, the product of segregated journeyman apprenticeship programs—were white. So, when Charlene Amos, a tall, dark-skinned Black woman with a short Afro, greeted me at the window of the personnel office, I was surprised.

With a gracious smile and strong handshake, Charlene introduced herself as the new Personnel Director. She ignored her desk and pulled up a chair alongside mine, as if we were old friends about to catch up on gossip. I estimated she was in her mid-thirties, like me. She was one of the first women I had seen wearing a pantsuit. Hers was olive green with a beige silk blouse. After some talk about Chicago weather, wind chill factors, and problems with frozen car locks, she launched a line of questioning that caught me off guard again.

"Do you have brothers?" She anticipated my affirmative nod, "How do you get along? You're the oldest?" She seemed pleased that I was the oldest and nodded her head with approval when I mentioned I could beat them at every game we played. Yes, I liked sports. What did any of this have to do with blueprints and micrometers? I wondered. Charlene pressed on.

"You know, Arlene, there are 1500 workers here. Some 1475 of them work in Operations, cutting steel on various lathes and milling machines, welding etc. Until three months ago, no women at all worked in Operations. You know what that means?" I thought to myself, "Sure, I know what that means. These sexist bastards are finally forced to give women a chance to earn the same as men." Before I decided on an appropriately-censored answer, Charlene answered her own question:

"Take Eddie, for instance. An old Irish guy. A month or so ago, he talked non-stop as he helped me start my car in the employee parking lot. This stocky, short, unattractive old white man tells me: 'I used to be a womanizer. I loved office work. It gave me a chance to meet a lot of women. Then my wife gave me an ultimatum. If I didn't change jobs, go to work at Danly, she would leave me. You see, everyone from Chicago knew that no women worked at Danly. For the 22 years I've been here, it's been like a monastery. My marriage was saved. Now, who knows! It's like women are crashing the men's locker room.'"

I chuckled. Charlene laughed too. This was the strangest job interview I had ever had.

"But, you know, Arlene, if all the guys here were like Eddie, we would have no problem." When she said "we," I knew she meant "us women" and mused that even if I didn't get the job, we might end up becoming friends. She leaned closer towards me to continue:

"Eddie is a cream puff. And he likes women. Unfortunately, most of the men here are hostile to women working and they often act on their hostility. Frankly, I know you can probably pass the blueprint test and the micrometer test. And, even if you can't, you can learn. What I'm really concerned about is your skill with handling men—especially hostile men. If men's approval is important to you, Arlene, you will not last here. Or if they make you so angry that you want to wring their balls off, you also won't last here. Do you hear what I'm saying?

I didn't tell her I was one of two women in my Industrial and Labor Relations class at Cornell University. I didn't mention that of the two women who started the graduate program in sociology at UC Berkeley in 1965, I was the one who managed to avoid flunking out. I didn't tell her about the book and newspaper articles I had written about women's oppression and liberation. I knew management would take my education and writing as evidence that I might turn out to be an "agitator."

I answered with more confidence than I felt. "I know I can handle it. I've been around men my whole life. You won't have to worry about me."

"I hope not. Can you start right away?"

"Yes! Thank you!" I nearly skipped back to the train station and grinned all the way home. Finally, I would be a machinist's helper and eventually a machinist, a member of the Steelworkers Union and my wage would more than double. I couldn't wait to tell Janelle, Jill and Michael. Maybe they could work at Danly's too. Even Charles might land a job there.

The following "Monday"—actually 11:30PM Sunday night—I arrived early for my first "day" of working the graveyard shift in Department 29 and pushed my employee card number 212079 firmly into the

slot beneath the time clock. With my head down, ignoring the whistles, "hi-sweeties", and "I'm-gonna-steal-you-from-your-husband", I followed the yellow line on the cement path starting from the women's locker room for at least ten minutes before I arrived at the Large Machine Department. I was dressed in baggy jeans, a men's extra large work shirt that I had bought second-hand and had stuffed all my hair under a bandana. It amazed me that they even noticed I was a woman, let alone cloaked their hostility in the language of sexual attraction.

The path led me through an indoor war zone. Incoming! Without warning, unguarded milling machines and lathes sent thousands of hot, sharp, jagged metal chips flying at high velocity. These shrapnel-like chips eventually landed on all surfaces. Those that settled on the floor quickly shredded the thickest work shoe soles. Those that settled on table tops, machine tops and benches lay in wait, like unexploded land mines, for the inexperienced worker to rest an arm or butt. I sustained two serious cuts that required stitches before I learned the machinists' discipline of never resting a body part on a surface without brushing off the chips first.

I was bombarded with sensory assaults: a relentless roar from a combination of hums, screeches, buzzes, moans, whirrs, sirens, bangs—emitted from almost every high-decibel producing machine known to industry; a pervasive putrid smell of rancid grease, solvent, molten steel, welding vapors and a variety of chemicals I could not identify; a burning haze of cast iron dust, powders and particles from cutting various grades of steel that filled my nostrils and coated all exposed skin surfaces. Thousands of glaring bulbs only dimly lit the cavernous space. No one at Danly—not even the shop steward or president of the Union Local—ever complained about these hazards. The Occupational Safety and Health Act was only a few years old. Management ignored it and workers never heard of it.

I was too naïve and proud to be frightened. I accepted the challenge of surviving in this war zone and looked forward to applying our political commitments to the demands of factory life and to earning and learning more from this job than I ever did working in academia or journalism. I was relieved that I had finally found a job that fulfilled my commitment to Dawson, the leader of our Seize The Time Collective. I had been persuaded by prevailing leftist ideology and by the disintegration of the

anti-imperialist movement into competing factions, that I needed first hand experience working in a factory to explore the revolutionary possibilities there. Ten minutes before the third shift started, at 11:50PM, I found my way to Kantorski, the general foreman of Department 29. He was a lean, thin-lipped white man, whose lined face seemed contorted in a permanent scowl. He was sitting at a gray metal desk, surrounded by a glass enclosure: his office. Gigantic machines, each at least two stories high, attached to platforms that could have been the foundations of small houses, surrounded and loomed over the office. Kantorski did not hear me approach, nor did he raise his head as I busied myself by reading a poorly-typed memo to Department 29 Personnel taped to his door.

Men—only white men—dressed in dark gray work shirts and pants were perched at most of the machines. A few were rifling through huge, multi-drawered tool boxes that sat on workbenches in the aisles that separated each machine. I was the only one in sight with safety glasses on. Even though they were newly-issued, I had to strain to see through the hazy lenses. Sweat accumulated on both the inside and outside of the plastic. Finally, I gathered the confidence to knock on the door. Kantorski grimaced. "So. You're the new machinist's helper."

I nodded, extending my hand. He ignored it. I stepped closer to hand him the papers Charlene Amos had given me to pass on to him. Catching the smell of stale cigarettes and newly-swigged whisky, I stepped back. He spat,

"I've been waiting for weeks for the new helper and I told them NOT to send me a woman, dammit. I understand they gotta hire some women to keep those government contracts. And maybe you girls will work out ok in the other departments, but not in the Large Machine Department. Never in 29! I just don't see how you can work out here. But no one in the front office listens to me. You think you can lift a fifty-pound cutter five feet off the floor?"

"Sure." I lied. I didn't even know what a cutter looked like.

"Even if you can, the Big Machine guys will never stand for a woman here. You know, the helper position goes vacant every six months. It's a stepping-stone for apprentices to learn to run their own machines. But no one will teach you shit. We'll see how long you last." He paused and

then, "All right, I'm gonna assign you to Bill Koznecky. Come on, lemme introduce you."

Koznecky also ignored my outstretched hand. Instead, he passed me the biggest wrench I had ever seen. It must have been three feet long and weighed at least 15 pounds. I tried to hide my surprise at its weight.

"I already cleaned the surface," he muttered, nodding in the direction of what I thought was a steel platform, perhaps 20 feet wide and 30 feet long, with deep parallel grooves crossing it. *"Tomorrow night, you make sure there's no grease or chips anywhere on the surface before you do the set-up. Tonight, I just want you to tighten down those shims and blocks."*

I glanced at the enormous bolts and hexagonal nuts that looked like they would fit into the head of the wrench that I was holding and thought I knew what to do. I nodded and climbed onto the platform. It was more slippery than I expected. I concentrated on avoiding an embarrassing fall. For a second, I enjoyed a small triumph. I had managed to grab the nut with the humongous wrench and pulled.

"For Chrissake," Koznecky yelled. "Wrong way." And then, not noticing the foreman was no longer in earshot, "Sonofabitch. This girl doesn't know which way to pull the wrench! Look man. She'll only slow me down. I need to make my bonus. I'd rather do the set up myself."

I answered. "Sorry, Bill. I know you turn it clockwise to tighten it. I just didn't realize it was upside down."

He grabbed the wrench out of my hand and ordered me to go to the supply room for some new cutting blades. "Here, take this empty box, so you're sure to get the right kind."

At the beginning of the shift, a few days after I started working at Danly, a white man with an Appalachian accent intercepted me as I emerged from the women's Locker Room. He was panting, as if he had sprinted a mile. "Hey," he called. I looked around to make a show of checking to see if he was calling to someone else.

The night before, he was the one I had observed with amazement as he hoisted immense chains made of links, each big enough to surround a huge watermelon, on top of one of the steel houses near the platform I

was cleaning. This stocky man with dirty-blond hair, whose muscled arms were coated with black machine grease, managed to truss up the ten-ton object in a web of chains and shackles that soon swung from an overhead crane. Then, like a squat spiderman, he climbed the ladder that rose along the wall from the shop floor to the cab of the crane suspended four stories above. He pressed the lever that snapped the chains taut and lifted the steel house off the platform into the air. I didn't have time to take cover as the monstrous thing swayed tentatively over my head, rose higher and, when it was at least 40 feet off the ground, picked up speed and moved swiftly out of sight to wherever the crane operator delivered it.

Now this guy, who could have easily killed me the night before, was blocking my path. I braced myself for a new dose of "nice tits" or "what ya doin' after work, baby?"

Instead, I heard, "Hey. You got a yellow foreign car with California plates?"

I nodded, ready to explain for the twentieth time, "Yes I used to live in California. Yes, the weather is better there." So why did I come here? I usually answered, "It's complicated."

The crane operator continued. "I just got in from the parking lot. I saw a guy breaking into your car."

"No." I groaned, knowing the insurance company would never pay me enough to replace my aging, but reliable Datsun. Then, in an instant, I remembered that Charles had driven me to work that night. He needed the car for some urgent business and rather than just drop me off at the gate, I insisted he take a peek inside the plant. I really wanted him to see for himself that I wasn't exaggerating when I described the Danly war zone.

"What did the guy look like?" I asked crane operator.

"A tall thin dark n*g...um, I mean, Black man."

I laughed. "Oh, don't worry. That's my husband. He drove me to work tonight." There was that "husband" lie again. Perhaps this man who thought he was protecting my car would disapprove of me less if I was in a respectable married relationship. Mainly I wanted to emphasize there was no need for spiderman to organize a white posse to save my car. But

whether Charles and I were married, lovers or casual friends didn't matter to the crane operator.

He shook his head, spat on the floor, and snarled, "n****r lover."

"What!" I matched his redneck disgust with a scowl which was meant to say, "you're a contemptible, mindless bug. I won't waste another word on you." Then I stepped defiantly around him, suppressing my fear, and marched off towards Department 29.

That was at midnight. By "lunch hour," our twenty-minute break at 3AM, the crane operator must have delivered the news like a diligent paper boy making his rounds throughout the plant. Before that night, I usually sat at the end of the long cafeteria table that seemed to be reserved for Large Machine operators. I offered them pieces of fresh coconut and they allowed me to listen to their lunchroom banter—a steady stream of macho jokes at each other's expense. I had no desire or intention to try to become "one of the boys," I just hoped that if I were friendly to them, eventually, they would be civil to me. Then I would figure out how to challenge their racism and misogyny. That night, when I approached the lunch table, all conversation halted. Those who faced me glared their message: "Stay away or else." The two men sitting nearest to the end where I usually sat, slid over and spread their thighs wide.

"All right," I mumbled to myself. "If that's the way you want it, fine with me." As I turned to leave the lunchroom, I sensed that phalanx of white men leering at me, their stares willing me to trip. Instead, I was smiling, "Fuck them," I thought. So began my habit, during lunch break or anytime I wouldn't be missed, of finding sanctuary in the women's locker room—sometimes to eat, sometimes to read, and most often, to sleep. By the fifth week on the job, during every shift, I managed to disappear unnoticed for at least an hour nap on the locker room couch. Although I didn't yet report it during one of our increasingly rare collective meetings, as the weeks passed, the wall against revolutionary factory organizing seemed more and more impenetrable.

As I explored the building for the shortest routes from the Large Machine Department to the women's locker room or the supply room, I noted that only two Black workers were machinists. Inside Danly, Chicago's

CHICAGO, Illinois, December 1978. In a bar across the street from Danly Machine Corporation, Ann, Ida, Jackie and Arlene—the only women on graveyard shift in a plant of 1500 men—have a Christmas drink after their shift.

rules of residential apartheid were mirrored in occupational apartheid. Nearly all the Black workers were either welders or service workers. In my explorations, I also discovered Danly's many alcoves where sleep-deprived workers sought refuge. The first time I found three or four men in gray work uniforms lying flat out on their backs, on work benches, motionless, I stopped and realized, "Oh, that's why they call it the graveyard shift." The image haunted me. Nearly every week, the grapevine carried news of someone's near-fatal accident: Hal's electrocution by exposed wires, Jim's arm amputation by an unguarded milling machine, and Steve's broken back from a fall from the crane. These injuries were considered "accidents, whereas major burns, blinding eye damage, exposure to ultra-violet radiation–the hazards welders faced–were routine. Each time I heard a new story, clammy sweat covered my back. Gil Scott Heron's refrain, "been working in a graveyard three miles down," played like a broken record in my mind.

After a few weeks on the job, I became obsessed with catching up on my sleep. Each morning, tense from heavy lifting and non-stop challeng-

es to my right to work from my co-workers, I staggered into the parking lot, surprised by the daylight. By the end of the week, I felt blessed to have survived another protracted battle in the war zone. A bit like a soldier coming home from the front, by the time I arrived home at 9AM, buzzing from both the vibrations of the machines and the quart-sized thermos of coffee I had drunk during the night, I felt jumpy and out of place in the quiet bedroom.

Neither could I find refuge in our Seize-the-Time Collective. We never formally dissolved, but an occasional letter from Dawson was not enough glue to hold us together. Only the pressure of needing a paycheck kept me at Danly for nearly two years, way past the six first months or so we met as a collective. For me, the path to revolution through a factory full of white men narrowed to a dead end.

Decisions and Hormones (1978)

As I met a widening circle of Charles' family and friends, I never heard anyone call him "Charles." Most called him "BG" and a few called him by his Muslim name which I heard as "Malik." Of course, I wouldn't dream of disrespecting his preferred name, so I asked if he preferred me to call him Malik. "No, it's Mali, call me Mali," he corrected impatiently. I never called him Charles or Malik again.

Mali had an errand to run with his sister, Jean. She lived with her three kids on the 11th floor of one of a forest of high-rise buildings, the Robert Taylor Homes—once the largest public housing project in the country. As we exited the Dan Ryan Expressway, Mali tried to prepare me for survival in that vertical ghetto. "Wait til you see the way they've caged us there, Ahlene. It's a prison without guards. Thousands of us are packed into these buildings. Twenty-five thousand. But if we ever try to escape, riot, take what's ours, we're surrounded. Penned in."

I scanned the scene, appalled to see the way the freeway and vacant lots bordered these 16-story cement blocks that stretched for miles. Mali added, "It's like an Indian Reservation. They can surround us and starve us out whenever they like."

As if we were visiting a prison, we had to walk through a wide no-man's land from the parking lot to the building where Jean lived. As we neared the building, Mali handed me a small pistol. Before I had time to question him, he whispered, "Put it in your purse. I can't get caught carrying it."

I hid my fear well and I gingerly placed the thing at the bottom of my

large leather purse. "What's it for? I mean, why do you need it?" I tried to sound calm.

"It's our insurance policy. This place is a jungle. They kill people over nothing. But don't worry. Everything should be ok, as long as the elevator is working."

As the elevator rumbled up to the 11th floor, my relief eclipsed the stench of urine and beer that rose from the floor. At least we wouldn't have to use the stairs. The elevator opened onto a long semi-open-air corridor. The floor-to-ceiling double layer of thick chain link fence that ran the length of the corridor made the floor, where kids played, look exactly like a prison tier.

We didn't stay long. While Mali and Jean consulted in the kitchen about some private family business, I tried to make conversation with her teenage son. "So you're a senior now?"

"Uh huh."

"Only a few months til graduation. How does that feel?"

His mother must have told him to be polite to me, so he endured a few more of my lame questions and then turned on the TV. Mali and Jean finally emerged from the kitchen and Jean apologized. "I'm sorry I can't invite you to stay for dinner. We have to be over at the Church in a few minutes."

When we finally climbed the carpeted flight of steps to our modest second-floor apartment in a neat little building on the tree-lined block, I felt rattled and exhausted. After dinner, Mali lit a joint, took a toke and passed it to me. I waved it away. "No thanks. Sometimes weed just deepens my bad mood. Maybe later."

He took another toke and passed it again, "Ya sure?" When I shook my head, he conceded, "Well, suit yourself." He smoked the thing until he needed a roach clip to hold it.

"You feel like going to that movie about the liberation struggle in Rhodesia?" I proposed. I needed a dose of revolutionary optimism.

"Nah. Actually, I gotta make a run. But why don't you go, I'll take the bus."

"OK." We kissed. He left.

Then, all my energy drained away. I couldn't imagine going back outside into the cold. I only wanted to have a glass of wine and watch some TV in bed. Some image on the TV, released a stream of questions about getting pregnant that I usually kept dammed up. Momentarily I conjured an image of Mali and I as new parents, his arm around me as I cradled a baby. "No way, impossible," I scolded myself and remembered how only a brief time earlier, when Mali finally told me that he was a father, he had declared, "Any woman I'm with will have to love my daughters too." I responded with an enthusiastic , "Of course." I took his declaration as evidence that he was a committed father and considered including me in his family. I was thrilled. However, weeks went by and he never mentioned his daughters again.

Finally, on the first Sunday after we had weathered a major argument, I suggested he invite his daughters over for a visit. He hesitated, and then smiled, "Great idea, Ahlene." We had driven to the Southside to pick them up. His ex-wife, Bettye, waited with them at the curb in front of a dilapidated house. As I turned slightly to open the car door, Mali snapped.

"What are you doing?"

"I just thought I'd introduce myself to Bettye. After all, she might want to meet the woman who will be with her kids all day."

Mali commanded. "Stay in the car. She don't need to meet you. The kids will be with me, their father. That's all she needs to know."

"What?" He slammed the car door shut on his side before I had a chance to protest. I couldn't hear their conversation, but from their jabs in the air with their gloved hands, I knew it was angry. The girls hadn't hugged their father. Almost motionless, they stood by, nearly the same height, in their matching pink parkas, their eyes wide, framed by the same high cheek-boned face as their father's. After a couple of minutes, he put his hand lightly on the taller girl's shoulder and raised his voice loud enough for me to hear,

"Trice, Pam, get in the car. We outta here."

I turned to face the two little girls in the back seat.

"Hi, my name is Arlene." I reached to shake the taller girl's hand. "Are you Trice?"

She shook her head up and down with the energy of a five-year old. "My name is Patrice." Then she poked her sister. "That's Pam."

"Pamela." The younger girl corrected her.

Although they were a year apart, they might have been twins, dressed alike, with the same beaded braids poking out of their hoods.

"Those are really pretty names," I resumed. "I'm glad to meet you both."

"Let's go," Mali interrupted. "Ya'll can get acquainted while we drive."

"Where we goin'?" Patrice asked.

"We're going to our place on the Northside. We'll have lunch there and then figure out what you want to do. OK?" I answered, hoping they wouldn't object.

"Of course it's ok, right girls," Mali interjected without facing them.

In the rear-view mirror, I saw them both nod. They weren't smiling. The heat in the car was on full blast. "Mali, why don't you help them unzip their coats," I suggested.

"They know how to dress themselves. Don't you girls?"

"Yes Daddy." Patrice answered with pride. The echo of a child calling him "daddy" jarred me. When we finally arrived, the girls took off their coats. As I saw them struggling with their boots, I helped, adding, "Make yourselves at home. What do you want for lunch? How about tuna fish sandwiches?"

For the first time, Pam, the younger sister, took the lead. "Nah. We hate tuna fish."

"Well, how 'bout spaghetti?" I chirped.

In unison. "Yay, we like spaghetti."

"Good. Mali, why don't you put on some music while I fix lunch."

"Sure, OK." He seemed distracted.

The girls followed him into the living room. He put on Gil Scott

Heron and began to sing with Gil, "What's the word? Johannesburg!" And motioned to his daughters.

Trice climbed onto his lap. Pam stood to the side. "C'mon," He repeated, "What's the word?" and pointed to Pam. On cue, she yelled "Johannesburg." Mali stretched out his arm, palm forward towards Pam's waiting palm. They all laughed together. Finally, Mali seemed like a cool father.

After one more chorus, Trice wriggled out of his lap. "Ya got a TV here?" she asked.

"Yeah. It's in there. Wait a sec, I'll turn it on for you." He seemed relieved and led them into the bedroom. After a few minutes, I called them into the kitchen for lunch. The girls trotted in while Mali yelled from the bedroom, "I'm on the phone. Be there in a sec." Patrice and Pam were nearly done with their seconds by the time Mali appeared in the kitchen and announced, "I gotta make an emergency run. I'll be back as soon as I can." The giggling over slurped spaghetti stopped abruptly and he left before any of us could question him. The girls were four and five years old with no capacity for hiding their disappointment. Trice started to whimper, while Pam reached to pat her on the back.

How could he do this to them? I muttered to myself. I might understand that he had important business, but these children understood only that their father had abandoned them. I felt an urgent responsibility to make it up to them.

"Trice, Pam, how about a movie?"

They eyed each other before either one answered.

"*Sparkle* is playing downtown. It's not too far away. You like Aretha's music don't you?" They nodded. I reached for the newspaper to check the time of the next show. Trice stopped crying but still looked forlorn. "C'mon. We gotta rush to get there before the show starts. Get your coats. You can buckle up your boots in the car. Let's race to see who gets there first." They laughed about beating me to the car. I couldn't believe how easy it was to shift their attention from Mali's disappearance to our race to the movies. I felt like kissing them.

After the movie, I called the apartment to see if he had returned.

There was no answer. Then, after we went for hamburgers, I called the apartment again. Still no answer. I gently took their hands and they squeezed mine as we returned to the car. At last, I took them back to their mother's place rather than risk another round of disappointment. After that day, I felt more confident about my own aptitude for motherhood, and quite sure that Mali had no desire to be anyone's father.

Should I give up on having a child or give up on building a relationship with Mali and look for another father? For days, at work, in the car, jogging, in the shower and especially in bed, I turned these questions over and over. Layers of contradictions and chaos, multiplied in my head. I could not hold onto the thought of banishing him from my life. His loving me made me feel fresh, special. He had filled the hole left by Lincoln's abandonment, by failed relationships with women, and by the movement's implosion. For nearly two months I had come to rely on him for companionship, comfort. Who would I be without him? And how much of myself would I betray by staying with him? How could he be the source of both my well-being and my anxiety? No matter how many journal pages I filled with these questions, answers eluded me.

Mali must have read the scribblings where I dismissed the thought of him fathering our child. "Why not?" He demanded, as he waved my journal in front of my face one morning.

"Why not? Why not what?" I repeated, then I realized what was bothering him. Rather than shift the issue to his violating my privacy, I was relieved to talk about it openly. "You don't seem to want another child. Your life is kinda up-in-the-air."

"Meaning?"

"You have no job. You don't talk about your plans with me. Besides, you don't seem to want to spend much time with the kids you already have."

"You leave Trice and Pam outta this. You know nothing about them and their mother." He sounded angry, but seemed more hurt than outraged.

"Sorry." I backed off. "So," I took an extra breath, "are you saying you would like to have a child with me?"

In an instant I realized that this was the question that lurked at the bottom of my other doubts. I assumed that Mali's ambivalence towards loving me—a white woman—generated his anger, his rages, his disappearances. If he decided he wanted to stay with me, even to have a baby with me, then he would commit to struggling in a principled way with me. Together we would draw on our differences to learn from each other and, as we learned, trust between us would grow.

He considered my question. "Do I want to have a kid with you? Sure. Yeah." He paused. "Hell yeah."

"Really?" I probed, "You sure? You know, as you always say, the world is too dangerous for anything but the truth."

"Sure, I'm sure, dammit." He declared, smiling.

I got up and reached for him across the table. We kissed. In an instant, it was settled. If I could get pregnant, Mali would become the father of my child. For months, I kept a basal thermometer on the night table. Each time I woke, I reached for the thermometer to check for the slightest temperature rise that would signal ovulation was imminent. Still, no matter how precisely I tracked my cycles and how those efforts drained the spontaneity out of our sex life, invariably, my period appeared.

One morning, on the first day a new cycle of blood had appeared, I dragged myself through the motions of dressing after another night shift at Danly. Anne's entrance into the lonely dressing room momentarily cheered me. She was in her thirties, a Black woman who had recently been hired as a crane operator. Anne appeared no taller or stronger than me, so I had watched her with fascination and admiration as she gracefully hoisted hundreds of pounds of shackles to lift tons of stamping presses. She had devised her own technique, using leverage and pulleys, rather than brute force. After the first time I saw her work, I told her, "You know, I used to think yours was the one job that only men could do. Let them keep it. On the contrary, after watching you work, I know us women could run this joint." We laughed and our friendship began.

"Hey, Anne, how's it going?"

"I'm cool. But this shift work messes with my cycles. I haven't had a regular moon yet."

I mumbled back to her. "My periods are too damned regular. I've been trying to get pregnant for months. It ain't happening."

"You might as well give up, honey," she touched my arm. "Your hormones need to know whether it's day or night in order for them eggs to drop. You'll never get pregnant til you quit graveyard shift." She turned to go and waved as she left. Locker room protocol required that no conversation, however intense, could interfere with leaving the plant as quickly as possible when the shift ended. Then she stopped in the doorway, "Hey, ya wanna get a drink across the street?"

I paused. "Uh no, no thanks" I couldn't admit to her that I was afraid that if I drank anything I would end up sobbing on her shoulder. I sank to the bench. I might begin menopause before I had enough seniority to make it to day shift. Then, the mention of "hormones" reminded me of another "hormonal" issue. I had finally been promoted to running my own milling machine in the small machine department. No longer a "machinist's helper," I looked forward to escaping the nightly harassment of the journeymen machinists I was required to serve. Although I had to admit to myself I really didn't know much beyond the basics of running a milling machine, I welcomed the chance to learn on my own.

With the exception of Pedro, a refugee from Pinochet's Chile, the men in the small machine department were just as hostile as the others. Walt, for example, a short stocky Polish man in his fifties, with muscular arms nearly as wide as my thighs, ran my machine during the 2nd shift. By tradition, machinists took pride in passing on their machine in top shape from one shift to the next. Worker solidarity obliged them to leave the machine in neutral and the work area clean. Yet, I had to spend nearly an hour cleaning and loosening the bolts that locked the machine into the wrong gear. One night, I arrived early and found Walt straining to tighten those bolts as far as possible. Except for the wrench and the pipe he was using for extra leverage, all his tools were stored and he was already in street clothes.

"Hey Walt!" I yelled. "What are you doing?"

"Oh, it's you." He turned to face me and scowled. "I don't have to answer to you."

Machines around us roared. I shook my head in fury and turned to

go to the ladies' room. "What's the matter," he taunted. "You having trouble loosening these bolts?"

"No!" I exhaled, realizing I no longer could control my rage. "No, but why the hell do you make it necessary for me to spend the extra time setting up? Don't you have better things to do with your clean-up time?" He reeked from sweat, machine oil and cigarettes.

"What the hell are you doing in this plant anyway?" He countered.

"Trying to earn a living just like you!" I suppressed the urge to add "asshole."

"This work ain't for girls and you know it." I wondered if he had a wife and daughters and how he treated them.

"You gotta be kidding. You're making my work harder just to prove women can't work here!" I yelled and took a few steps back.

"What's wrong with you anyway?" He shouted. "You must have a hormone problem or something? Yeah. It's gotta be that. They say it's hormones."

"What!"

"The only girls who work here must not be real girls." He sneered.

"You are one ignorant bastard," I mumbled, no longer caring what he thought.

Dessie Woods, Borinqueña and The Northern Route (1978-1979)

As the summer of 1978 approached, I still wasn't pregnant, and my reasons for wanting to work at Danly made less and less sense. The plan to organize white factory workers into an anti-racist collective disintegrated long ago. I had been running my own milling machine in the small machine department for a few months. Each time I botched a job—read the blueprint wrong, made a cut too close or along the wrong edge—I hid the evidence of my mistake in the bottom of my locker. Soon the pile of shiny steel blocks left no room for a change of clothes. If the foreman had any idea of how much expensive tempered steel I was wasting, he would have canned me on the spot.

The heat blasting off the Great Plains, the humidity and the 1000-mile distance from any ocean breeze made me long for San Francisco. Chicago's summer night sky—a pink/blue haze of toxic smoke from the steel mills—cast a menacing glow. I had read that breathing that air for a day was like smoking a pack of cigarettes. I fretted about my health. Still I refused to give into thoughts of leaving Chicago. It was too soon to quit trying to make a life away from the "Disneyland" of San Francisco. "And besides," I told myself, "I'm starting to feel like I could accomplish something in the Chicago left political scene."

After one or two tries, Mali refused my repeated coaxing to come with me to meetings to support affirmative action or independence for Puerto Rico. "All those white folks talking just to make themselves feel important. Later for that." To my surprise, the night I came home af-

ter a meeting about the campaign to gain the release of Dessie Woods, he wanted to know more. In 1976, Dessie Woods, a 31-year-old Black woman from Atlanta, who weighed less than 100 pounds, wrestled with a white man for his gun as he tried to rape her. He died and she was convicted and sentenced to 22 years in prison. Mali whistled after he heard the story.

"Now there's a sistah I can relate to. It's about time we teach those crackas a lesson. But do you think some penny ante demonstration will ever get her out of prison?"

I jumped at the opening. "Maybe. Not one demonstration alone, of course, but if we keep up the pressure, we could embarrass the government into overturning the verdict. President Carter is always talking about human rights. Here's a chance to call his bluff. Tell him and the world that human rights begin at home."

Mali liked the cause and he got caught up in my enthusiasm for the demonstration. So, at the start of July 4th weekend, we boarded a chartered bus and headed to Plains, Georgia. We joined what we hoped would be thousands of people, from all over the country, descending on President Carter's hometown, population 600, most of whom depended on his peanut plantation. We settled into our seats on the bus in the evening. Three to a seat in every row. There was no room to stretch out.

For the first leg of the 18-hour trip, I sat wedged between Mali and Caroline, a large bespectacled woman from the Southside of Chicago. She was a single mother and social worker who had left her eight-year-old son with neighbors so she could march for Dessie Woods. As the Chicago skyline receded into the distance, Caroline mused aloud, "It's time, high time, Black folks defend our own."

"Right on, sistah," Mali encouraged her. She continued, sharing her memories:

*"I remember, as if it were yesterday, I must have been eight or nine, like my son is now. Me and my brother were sitting in the back seat of our father's car. Until that day, we thought our father was all-powerful. King of the world, or at least our world. I don't know why, but a white cop pulled our father over and ordered him out of the car. He pointed a gun at our father and yelled something like, 'N****r, put your hands up. Don't move or I'll*

*blow your N****r head off.' I had never heard anyone yell those forbidden words at our father, let alone point a gun at him. And our father obeyed. I was terrified. If our father could not protect himself, I knew he could never protect me or my brother. It's a horrible lesson that all Black kids used to learn—one that I hope my son will never have to even think about."*

I winced, trying to imagine life as a child who could never take her safety for granted or feel like her parents could provide sanctuary from sudden death. In the early afternoon, we staggered off the bus and followed someone with a pile of picket signs towards the central square where fewer than 1000 people were marching in a circle. "Free Dessie Woods," "Free Her Now," we joined the chanters. Except for us demonstrators, the town seemed deserted, eerie. Even the lush native trees wilted in the heat. For a while, I thought I saw images of lynched men, "strange fruit hanging from the poplar trees." There was no press to witness our march, let alone deter a beating by the Klan that must have been lurking.

I had to agree with Mali who grumbled, "What the hell are we doing in this god forsaken place that even the rednecks have deserted? Just because there's a sign that says 'home of President Carter,' doesn't mean that he's there, waiting to listen to us!"

We marched for an hour or so until the sun forced us to seek sodas and shade. Then, after barely two hours on the ground, we boarded the buses to haul us back to the north. I sat across the aisle from Rosario. She was a Puerto Rican woman who I had met at a Puerto Rican solidarity meeting. She offered me and Mali half of her orange. I gladly accepted. She was one of the few women who spoke out in those meetings. As I sucked on the orange, she asked, "You're Arlene Eisen right, the one who wrote that book, *Women of Viet Nam*?"

I had no idea how she knew that. In Chicago, I had been virtually incognito as a writer or anti-war activist. Her acknowledgment of my former identity felt good.

"I loved that book," Rosario continued. "It's the only book I've seen to come out of the woman's movement that shows how women's oppression strengthens colonial oppression and vice versa. We used it in our study group. After we read that chapter on rape in Viet Nam, we decided to join this coalition for Dessie Woods."

"Really?" I felt almost giddy from her compliment.

"When you first came to one of our meetings, I wanted to talk to you, but you disappeared before I had a chance."

"I work graveyard shift, so it's hard to stay around after meetings." I explained.

"So you're living in Chicago now—not just visiting?"

"Yes, just south of Uptown." I answered. She persisted,

"Look, I'm gonna have to clear this with José and the others, but I have a great idea and I'm sure they'll dig it. You know the MLN, the Movimiento de Liberacion Nacional, is opening an accredited community college in the fall, we need teachers. How would you like to teach Women's Studies at Borinqueña Campus, the first college in the country to be run by Puerto Rican revolutionary nationalists?"

I was so flattered, without asking one question about course content, the students, hours or pay, I blurted out, "Of course. Sure. I'd love to."

Rosario had assured me that she would arrange for me to meet José Lopez, one of the leaders of the MLN, and brother of the Armed Forces of National Liberation (FALN) fugitive, Oscar Lopez Rivera, to figure out the details. I was elated.

I worked at kicking all the snow off my shoes before stepping over the threshold that separated that frigid February day from our steam-heated apartment. Apparently, I missed a clump, which quickly melted as I stepped inside. I glanced down to see an unstamped white business envelope in danger of absorbing the small puddle slowly spreading on the polished wood floor. I rescued it from the puddle and turned it over looking in vain for a clue to its origins. It was too thin to contain anything that might be physically threatening, but its unknown sender knew where we lived—which was menacing enough.

Mali was scrubbing the crust out of his favorite oatmeal pot, and didn't hear me come in. "Hi, I'm home." I held the envelope out as I joined him by the sink. "Did you see this?"

"What?" He dried his hands on his jeans and reached to draw me to

him. I usually relished our good-morning-kiss, but that day, I wriggled out of his embrace. "This envelope. Any idea when it came? Did you hear anyone slip it under the door?"

He shrugged and shook his head "Nah. So are you gonna open it or what?"

I hesitated, then felt foolish for my hesitation and ripped the soggy envelope open.

"Miss Eisen. It has come to our attention that you have violated the terms of our rental agreement by having a man live with you in 3822 N. Jansen, Apartment 2W. We are concerned about the moral reputation of our property and therefore require that you vacate the premises by May 1, 1979."

Mali shook his head and mumbled, "Fuckin' crackas."

I re-read the letter, at first incredulous, then furious.

"You know, this is starting to feel like a pattern. Just the other night at work, a supposedly sympathetic assistant foreman explained to me why I would never get a promotion at Danly. He had the nerve to say to me, 'Look Arlene, you know I don't care if you're a go-go dancer on your own time. But some people hold it against you.'"

I paused. Mali took my rigid hand and brought it to his lips. "Hold what against you?"

"The asshole told me that some people hold my 'private' life against me. You know they think any white woman who chooses a Black man must be a whore. Now this eviction notice is saying the same thing. I wonder which of our neighbors snitched."

"It don't matter," Mali asserted as he began to knead my tense shoulders. "What matters is us and how we feel. Are ya scared?"

Without thinking I answered, "Of course not. It's just a hassle to find a new place to live. They gave us til May, but that's not the point. They have no right to kick us out of our home. Our rent is on time. Always on time."

"Oh Ahlene. I see I have to teach you more about your people." He smiled to make sure I understood that this time, he didn't include me in that mass of enemy white folks. "They only play by their rules when it suits them."

"I know, I know."

"Look, Ahlene. We need to talk more. But I got a job interview in a few minutes. Can I borrow the car?"

"Sure. Just remember I'm teaching tonight and I'll need it back by 6:30 at the latest." I knew from experience that it was unlikely he'd come home directly after the interview. I handed him the keys. He kissed me gently. "Try to get your sleep. I gotta run."

I lay in bed, trying to fall asleep in time to get at least six hours sleep before I had to leave for Borinqueña Campus to teach and then drive to Danly for the graveyard shift. As I redistributed my weight from one uncomfortable position to another, I had to admit that unease, yes, even fear, had replaced my fury. It had been more than 16 years since I met Malcolm X and had been part of the movement against racism. I had marched against housing and job discrimination that others faced. I had marched with the Black Panthers against police brutality and for Huey Newton's freedom—for Dessie Woods. But now, I felt the personal bitterness of losing my home and potentially my job. A new feeling of vulnerability made me shiver despite the hissing steam heat. I sank with the realization that no matter how hard I worked, no matter how many degrees I had, no matter how sensible my choices, our safety, comfort, even survival, were out of my control. White cops, landlords, foremen, even white neighbors could move against us without warning, with impunity. Where would we live? And what if I were pregnant?

That February the news that China invaded Viet Nam cracked the bedrock of my political confidence that revolutionaries around the world would join forces against their common enemy: US imperialism. Prairie Fire had imploded. Our Seize the Time Collective had also disintegrated. I could not deny the truth of Mali's criticism of the pervasive racism of white women's politics. Hell, I couldn't deny that only a handful of white anti-rape groups had supported Dessie Woods. On the other hand, I loved teaching at Borinqueña, and thought work with the Pontiac Prisoners' Defense Coalition would not only free some prisoners, we were also in the early stages of building a movement against mass incarceration. It was hard to imagine leaving this new foundation of my political world.

However, I could imagine leaving Chicago.

Instead of sleeping, I turned to a blank page in my journal and wrote two headings across the top: "Why stay" and "Why go." Under "why stay" I wrote:

Mali's family, his roots, his responsibilities—especially his daughters—are here. (I sensed Mali's self-assurance might suffer if he had to make a home in a strange new city.)

Teaching Women's Studies and Political Economy at Borinqueña is going great.

Responsibilities to the Pontiac Prisoners Defense Coalition.

Ann and a few other new Chicago friends.

I strained to find another item and added one more reason to stay: "*I came to Chicago to learn more about the heartland, to escape the fantasyland of San Francisco. It's too soon to quit.*"

The "why go" list grew more effortlessly:

At Danly, I count the hours and minutes til quitting time and the days until Sunday. I feel like I'm wasting, counting away my life there. I hate the work.

Mali will be safer in San Francisco where no Nation of Islam factions, gangs or knife-wielding step-brothers hold a grudge against him.

Borinqueña Campus will probably lose its financial support soon and have to close.

The Pontiac Brothers Coalition will continue fine without me.

My roots and real friends are still in San Francisco.

A bi-racial relationship will be easier in San Francisco. We could live in the Fillmore or Mission—both integrated neighborhoods.

Through my connections both me and Mali will have an easier time finding jobs.

I hate the winters here with wind chills that hurt.

That night, Mali returned exactly at 6:30, early enough for me to get to Borinqueña. I grabbed the notes from a Women's Studies class I had

taught at San José State and raced out the door. Originally, José Lopez, the Director of the School and leader of the Puerto Rican nationalist community in Chicago, suggested that I lecture in English and one of the bilingual students would translate, but even I got bored hearing everything twice. Of the 20 people in the class, everyone, except me, was fluent in Spanish. So, we decided to conduct the class in their language. This night would be the first time I attempted to lead the class in Spanish. I scanned the group—nearly all young women—and began:

"Patriarquía es el sistema de opresion de mujeres..."

I paused because all the students were either chuckling or, out of courtesy, attempting to suppress their laughter.

"*Qué es tan cómico*?" I appealed to Maritza, who was the most outspoken of the women students. She motioned to the others to stop and answered me, *"Perdoneme compañera Arlene*, you mean *el patriarcado*, don't you?"

I nodded, "*Sí gracias*," and attempted to continue the lecture. I had planned to define patriarchy and its relation to racism and imperialism and then ask the class to discuss how patriarchy functioned in Puerto Rico and in the Puerto Rican diaspora. Before I finished the next sentence, four young women raised their hands to offer their opinions. My semi-literate Spanish had dissolved all the traditional reserve students used to maintain their distance from their teacher. They quickly understood that given my reliance on them for a nuanced expression of anything I had to say, their days of passivity in the classroom were over. I never had to worry again about encouraging their active participation. I savored the camaraderie of learning together and happily looked forward to the rest of the semester.

As I left Borinqueña that night, I ran into Mara, a lawyer from the People's Law Office. I grabbed the chance to ask for advice about the eviction. I thrust the eviction notice into her hand before she had a chance to refuse. As she read, I blurted, "It's racism, pure and simple. We had been talking about moving anyway, but not before the summer. You think I can sue the guy?"

Her advice came quickly,

"You can probably play for time: get the eviction date postponed a few weeks or even months. But if you try to sue the landlord for discrimination, there will be heavy court expenses, it could get ugly and you would probably lose anyway. Why don't you just write him a note saying you will vacate the apartment as soon as possible, but it will not be possible to do so before, say, August. That you've consulted a lawyer and although you would rather settle the matter amicably, if he forces you to leave before August, you will take him to court."

I hugged her. "Sounds like a plan." I answered more cheerfully than I felt. Of course, she made sense. I had no money for a legal case and would not even consider asking that the People's Law Office spend their limited time on this personal issue. Not with the cases of the Pontiac Brothers, Attica Brothers, Fred Hampton's assassination or any of the other lawsuits that swamped their office. After all, if they sued every racist Chicago landlord, they would need a staff of thousands.

Despite nineteen months of basal thermometer readings, a laparoscopy, numerous visits to the fertility doctor and my extravagant purchase of a squash blossom fertility necklace, on that hot July morning that I resigned from Danly Machine Corporation, my period arrived as usual. I swore my body had betrayed me. I would never get pregnant. I would return to San Francisco with Mali and re-dedicate myself to the movement, try to find a decent-paying job as a machinist, reknit ties with who was left of my old family of woman friends and forget about becoming a mother.

I traded my old beat-up Datsun for an even older beat-up Chevy van. After a frantic week of saying good-bye, recording all our favorite music onto an eight-track tape player, and shipping 30 cartons of books and papers to San Francisco, we crammed everything else into that van. Then, on a stifling August morning, we headed north. We assumed we would encounter less hostility on a Canadian route to California.

No job or family responsibility waited for us in San Francisco. So, we drove like vagabonds, taking our time, stopping to swim or take a side route along a scenic trail. To save money and ugly encounters, we rarely stopped at restaurants and never stayed in a motel. Rather, we munched

from bags of fruit, chips and nuts that I replenished when we passed a supermarket and we spread our sleeping bags out by the side of a deserted road whenever we grew weary. With the accompaniment of John Coltrane or Archie Shepp, for hundreds of miles we passed a joint back and forth as we watched the Canadian prairie and Rockies unspool on our private movie screen. Finally, after more than two weeks, we headed South. By then, that old Chevy van felt like a womb on wheels that I dreaded leaving. As we drove southward through the rainforest of the Pacific Northwest, we wailed along with Jimmy Cliff, *"Many rivers to cross. But I still can't find my way over..."*

When we first set out, I had been looking forward to long, soulful conversations when we would reach a new, deeper understanding and trust. In fact, we tracked hundreds of miles without talking at all. As I drove, Mali sat for hours staring out the window. For several days, the music and marijuana were enough company. Also, a vague feeling of nausea broke through my marijuana haze. I dismissed it as car sickness. Or perhaps, I thought, it's anxiety about finding jobs and a place to live in San Francisco.

On September 16, 1979, the California border appeared very suddenly. We sat by the ocean a while, which comforted me, and later found a place where we could ride horses along the beach, past sea lion caves. That night, as we lay in our sleeping bags on the beach, I reached across the small ridge of sand between our two bags and lay my hand on the center of Mali's chest, "Mali, I need to talk to you. During this drive, we have probably spent more time together than we did during all of last year, yet we have hardly spoken. I feel like you want to be somewhere else."

"That's not true, Ahlene."

I pressed on. "Well, what is true? Are you sorry about this decision to move to California? Are you tired of being with me?"

"No, it has nothing to do with California or with you. I just have my own problems. Too many contradictions to talk about. Don't take it personally."

As he turned over, my hand slid off his chest and fell into the sand. The next day I wrote in my journal, *Something is wrong, but he won't talk about it. I don't feel very good right now either. And, my period is a week*

late. I haven't told Mali yet because all this travel is probably, upsetting my system, causing the delay. No sense announcing another false alarm.

Yet, miraculously on September 21, five days after we arrived in San Francisco and settled into the spare room in Miranda's apartment, my journal recorded, in bright red, black and green colors—the colors of the Black Nation flag: "Today I got the results of a pregnancy test." And in large letters printed diagonally across the page:

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After all those months of temperature taking and planned intercourse, strangely, the news surprised and frightened me. When the nurse at San Francisco General's clinic scientifically calculated that the baby was due May 19th, I accepted the news with trepidation. It should have been cause for celebration—even the due date was auspicious: the hallowed birthday of Malcolm X, Lorraine Hansberry and Ho Chi Minh.

The journal entry continued*: "Now that the word is in, I'm worried—about miscarriage, frightened of the contradictions between me and Mali and frightened of bringing a Black child into this genocidal world. Also, to be honest, I am also frightened of losing my independence. I had been thinking about going on the Solidarity Brigade to Nicaragua..."*

I felt nauseous, unable to focus my thoughts. I stared at the blue cardboard cover of the spiral notebook I used as a journal.

Suddenly, I felt I needed a more beautiful cover for the journal that would document the most significant journey I had ever taken. I remem-

bered that I had seen a *National Geographic* magazine earlier that day on the kitchen table. Seconds later, I found it opened to a story that featured a woman, dressed in a carefully embroidered dark blue dress, adorned with beautiful slate-colored beads. She held a little girl, wearing a light blue dress, to her bare breast that emerged from a flap in her own dress. As she nursed her baby, she tilted her head slightly, not towards the baby in a traditional Madonna pose. Rather, her pensive eyes seemed focused beyond the child, perhaps planning how to make their lives better. The perfect cover for my journal, I thought. I carefully guided the scissors around the edge of the photo, found some tape and soon I had a journal worthy of the next entry. I wrote: *"After talking with Miranda, I'm not thinking about my fears. I can only think about being a mother, nursing, nurturing a warrior. I'm ready.... And I'm more confident that I'll find a way of dealing with the problems with Mali."*

Part Five:
“Never to Be Alone Again”
(1979-1983)

Pregnant, Iran and Letting Go (1979-1980)

It was the third month of pregnancy and we hadn't yet found jobs or our own place to live. At least we had returned to San Francisco where a walk by the immense ocean, alone with the crashing waves and timeless cliffs, had always comforted me. On one of those late fall days—the time when snow had already fallen in Chicago—the temperature in San Francisco hovered near seventy. Instead of combing through the classified ads, I headed for the ocean. For miles, I concentrated on straddling the line between where the wet sand was firm enough to walk without effort and the space where the tide constantly threatened to bring the frigid water racing over my shoes. My nausea had receded a bit, but cramps frequently forced me to slow my pace.

Early in the evening, when I returned to Miranda's apartment, I felt tired and crampy. Curious, I went to the bathroom to check the source of the wetness between my legs. The sight of my blood-saturated panties and the dark-red stain spreading in the crotch of my jeans confused me. It couldn't possibly be a period. Then, a panicked understanding set in. I clutched my stomach hard, as if that would stop the bleeding and pleaded, "No, stop!" How could my body fail again!

I rifled through my purse for the midwife's card. After she picked up the receiver, through a fog of fear, I heard: "I hate to say this, Arlene, but it sounds like you're having a miscarriage. Come in first thing in the morning, we'll check."

A new cramp twisted my stomach in pain. "Think, Arlene," I told

myself. "Don't panic. There must be something I can do. There is always something I can do."

Then aloud, in a strangely calm voice, I asked the midwife, "OK, I'll see you at nine, is there anything I can do in the meantime?"

"No, just rest. If you're miscarrying, nothing will help. Try to get some sleep."

I was too consumed with nervous fear to rest, let alone sleep. I checked the index of every pregnancy book I owned about miscarriage. They all said, stay in bed. So that night, instead of going to a meeting about the Iranian Revolution, I stayed in bed. But sleep was out of the question. In vain, Mali attempted to raise my spirits.

"Maybe our little warrior is protesting. Maybe he wants more ice cream,"

"What!"

"Jus' kiddin!"

"This isn't funny."

"I know. But you need to lighten up. All your worrying ain't helpin' either."

I rolled away from him into a fetal position.

He reached for my shoulders and kneaded them gently. "You don't blame me, do ya?"

For weeks I had been begging him to rub my aching back. Now I wanted him to stop, but could not bring myself to say anything. After some time, all I could say was, "Do you think you could find me some Kotex?"

The next morning, after the midwife finally completed various tests, she announced, "There's no amniotic fluid in the blood. Your cervix is not dilated. And your baby's heartbeat is normal. I don't think she or he is in danger."

Before I could ask a single question, she handed me the stethoscope. I heard very quick-tempo beats, regular, but far away, like they were coming from the bottom of the ocean floor. For the first time since I found

out I was pregnant, pregnancy meant more than nausea, cramps and fears. Beyond the abstraction of expecting a baby, I now knew, for sure, there was a person inside me, growing—the love and warrior of our creation. My eyes filled with tears of joy as I listened to the beat and finally handed the stethoscope to Mali.

"It's often normal to have some staining in the first trimester. I'm sorry if I alarmed you." The midwife interrupted the wondrous music we were hearing. "Go home, over the weekend, keep your feet elevated as much as possible. You'll be fine."

Following the miscarriage panic, I spent two days in bed without a sign of blood. On the third day, I went for a short walk, from our apartment off Mission and 19th Street to the library on 24th. Still no blood. Each day after that, I ventured a little further before checking for blood. Finally, after a week, I felt reasonably confident about resuming normal activities.

On the morning of November 4th, my birthday, I sat in the kitchen sipping peppermint tea and nibbling on saltine crackers—hoping to keep the nausea at bay. I had decided to go apartment hunting that day, but an announcement on the radio preempted that plan.

"The so-called Iranian Revolution has taken a turn for the worse. Mobs have surrounded and stormed the US Embassy in Tehran and taken its occupants hostage. The millions of people who demonstrated for the Shah's ouster apparently have not been satisfied with his departure. Khomeini's Revolutionary Guards are now demanding that the US force the Shah to return to Iran for trial in exchange for the release of 66 hostages. Stand-by for a statement from President Carter."

The announcement brought to mind a meeting I had a year earlier with some men who called themselves Iranian Fedayeen. They explained they were socialists and believers in Islam and wanted to translate my book into Farsi. They thought the example of Vietnamese women would inspire and legitimize the growing activism of Iranian women against the Shah's dictatorship. Of course, I gave them permission. A year later, I wondered if any of the people who were occupying the US Embassy in Tehran had read my book.

I turned on the TV for more information. Footage of Iranian men on the Embassy roof, setting the US flag on fire filled the screen. Commentators called for a declaration of war against Iran and defended the Shah's record of service to the US government. I leafed through my address book, looking for the numbers of people in our old anti-Viet Nam War coalition. A few days later, a handful of us sat in the basement meeting room of the old Unitarian church, trying to decide what to do. I missed Diana and some of my other old comrades who had disappeared after Prairie Fire imploded. Still, there were enough of us anti-imperialists left in San Francisco to launch a campaign against the Shah staying in the US.

On November 24, nearly a thousand people gathered in Union Square for a rally to begin to expose the CIA coup that brought the Shah to power, and his record of torture and corruption. I held the bullhorn and began the rally with a chant. "Shah go home! Shah go home!" Following Mali's suggestion, I compared the racism in the growing harassment, assaults and deportations of Iranian people in the US with the deep-rooted, persistent US tradition of lynching Black people.

We had no permit for the rally, and soon a couple of cops approached the stage. I continued my speech while Nina spoke with the cops. She motioned to me that they wanted the rally to stop. I announced to the crowd. "The cops say it is illegal for us to gather here, but before we disperse, we have a few more things to say. Is that OK?" The crowd cheered.

I addressed the cops through the bullhorn so everyone could hear. "We'll disperse very soon. We just have one more speaker, who won't take more than five minutes." I caught the eye of a woman from a group of Iranian exiles who were sympathetic to the Peoples' Mojahedin. She was scheduled to be our main speaker. She shook her head and spoke loud enough for me to hear, "You're doing fine. I can't speak now and risk deportation. You finish for me."

The cops were on their radios and I saw a few people drift away from the Square.

I resumed on the bullhorn. "Our sister here from Iran has a lot to say, but the police here would rather protect the reputation of a corrupt dictator than her right to free speech." I turned to point to the sister, but

she had already disappeared. And now there were at least 20 cops surrounding the stage. Two of them strode towards me.

"Just give me a minute more so we can disperse peacefully." My audacity and composure amazed me. I felt braver than I had ever felt before when closely surrounded by police.

"You've had enough time, lady. You're under arrest."

"For what?" I demanded, although I hated the implicit acknowledgment that their laws had any legitimacy. In the meantime, the remaining people began to chant, "Let her go. Let her go." Despite the defiant chant, the crowd parted as each cop grabbed an arm and pushed me towards the squad car. "Where are you taking her? She's pregnant. You're responsible for her safety," Nina yelled.

The cop on my right yelled back, "The Northern Station. She'll be at the Northern Station. You can bail her out there."

A small crowd of my comrades got to the Northern Station before me and my captors. As the cops pushed me past them, a woman yelled. "Don't worry. We'll get you out soon." And followed us inside the Precinct. My hands weren't cuffed, so I raised my hand in a fist and smiled. Suddenly, a wave of nausea swept over me. Although my morning sickness had ebbed in recent days, I still needed a steady supply of saltines or sour dough bread to counter the queasiness that always loomed. I yelled to no one in particular. "Try to get me some saltines..." The cops pushed me toward the holding cell. As they slammed the barred door behind me, I noticed a sign hand-painted in large red letters above the gate, "THE SLAMMER"

"Ha," I thought. "Someone here thinks he's funny," and scanned the cement bench for the least grimy place to sit. I was the only one in the cell. My friends chanting outside never gave me a chance to feel alone. The place stank, but if I remembered not to inhale too deeply, it was bearable. Now, if only I had something for the nausea, I'd be fine. I sat on the bench, gently stroking my belly, and for the first time, I spoke to the baby growing inside. "Hi honey. Here you are, barely 15 weeks in the womb, and you get your first whiff of prison air. I hope it doesn't bother you too much. Don't worry. We'll be out soon. Maybe this will even be useful preparation for you as a future revolutionary."

"Hey." A cop stood outside the cell with a thin white bread sandwich in his hand. "Your friends say you have to eat. You want one of these?"

"What is it?" I asked.

"Bologna."

Ugh. I was about to refuse, but then thought better of it. "Thanks." I took the sandwich but before I could nibble on the crust of the white bread as I had planned, I felt like I was drowning in the stench of bologna. It clogged my nose and throat. I heaved until there was nothing left in my stomach. The cop on the other side of the bars was flustered.

"You ok?"

Exhausted from the choking, I didn't answer right away. Finally when I could speak, "No I am not ok. I need some water. I need to go to the bathroom and I need to get out of here. Do you know if they've posted my bail yet?

"Just a second. I'll find out."

"What about the bathroom," I yelled after him.

After a while, a sergeant came in, and opened the cell. "You can go now. Just make sure you don't pull this shit again."

I staggered out into the fresh air. Lisa, Miranda and Nina were still waiting for me. Between hugs, I devoured the package of saltines Lisa handed me.

Shortly after New Year's, I made my way around the obstacle course of the unpacked boxes in the living room and into the kitchen. I needed some tea. The kettle was the first item I had pulled out of a carton labeled "kitchen" in red marker. Sun poured into the tiny kitchen through the two large bay windows. As I waited for the water to boil, I marveled at our luck. Finally, we had our own place. My old friend Gail had moved to Berkeley and was happy to turn over her rent-controlled place to us. The rent would stay at $105 a month and we would not have to deal with a landlord who might refuse to rent to a Black man. We would continue paying rent in Gail's name to a real estate agent who never visited the old Victorian building on 25th Street off Mission.

The large octagonal living room that filled the corner of the building had beautiful oak window seats built into the wall under huge bay windows that lined two sides of the room. Oak also trimmed the hallway and bedroom, which was large enough for our double bed, a crib and dresser. I had plans for the walk-in closet and hallway that led from the entryway to the bathroom. We would knock out the sheetrock between the immense closet and hallway to make a room for the baby when she or he was too old to sleep in our bedroom.

I inhaled the minty steam from the tea and the urge for roast beef overcame me. Since I had emerged from the chronic haze of morning sickness, every day, towards late afternoon, I craved a roast beef sandwich on sourdough bread. The medium rare meat had to be thinly sliced. Often, I hiked up 24th street to the deli to splurge a bit of my welfare check on a fresh sandwich. No mayo or mustard. Maybe a little bit of ketchup. Dianda's, a landmark bakery on Mission Street around the corner from our apartment, sold its hot, freshly-baked, crunchy sourdough bread every Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday morning. That afternoon, I still had some leftover bread and meat in the fridge, which I quickly sliced into a sandwich and toasted in the oven.

Sipping tea and munching on the sandwich, I studied the peach tree that grew on the other side of the kitchen window. As soon as the fruit ripened, in a few months we would be able to pluck peaches right from our opened window. I smiled broadly when I estimated the fruit would be ready for picking about the same time as I would give birth. The sound of Mali's key in the lock interrupted the thought.

As he opened the door I caught the irresistible scent of sourdough bread. He beamed, "Hey, how you doin?" he asked as he handed me a fresh baguette. I grabbed the bread, kissed it and then him. "How did you know? I was craving some sourdough so bad that I've been resorting to eating even the stale stuff."

He chuckled, kissed me again and as he tore off a hunk of the baguette for himself, cleared his throat and in a softer voice than usual, "Arlene, I know we're always talking about racism. But me and you gonna have to talk more REAL."

"What do you mean?" I braced myself for an angry rant.

"Hold on. I'm gettin' to it." His tone was kind. Pensive. He took my hand. "I can't be married to no white woman who don't respect Black people. I know you talk a lot about racism. But what's in your heart of hearts?"

"Well..." I began to answer.

"Don't talk. Just listen and think. Think and figure out what's really true. This world is too dangerous for anything but the truth. It ain't so much your soul I'm tryin' to save, it's mine and our son's."

He continued by offering examples, gently, without anger, to encourage me to check myself without trying to respond on the spot. He concluded, "I love you because you TRY to do the right thing, not because you always do it. Lord knows."

I exhaled and nodded. "I hear you." There was no need for me to say more.

"Oh yeah, there is one more thing." He paused, weighing his words, "Yes, you've said it may be a girl and I'm not being sexist. But I just know it will be a boy." He stroked my belly. "Our son will grow to be a Black man. No matter what happens to you and me, he will be Black. You can't never confuse him with all that biracial bullshit. He will be a proud, Black man. Promise me you won't try to interfere with that."

I totally agreed and without hesitation, "I promise."

Two years had passed since our first date and during those two years, at least once a day I found myself wishing, sometimes searching, sometimes suggesting and sometimes nagging, "Mali, why don't you join a revolutionary organization?" But when such an organization invited him to join a month-long orientation for new recruits, I panicked. With the slight waddle of an overweight woman nearly six months pregnant, I paced from the kitchen, to the hallway, around the unpacked boxes into the living room and back.

"Why can't they have the orientation here?" I stammered, immediately ashamed of my self-centeredness. The organization had honored Mali with the invitation to its national meeting. He would have a chance to learn from principled revolutionaries. I wouldn't dream of interfering

with his political development or with the contribution he would make to the struggle.

He beamed. "Ahlene. It's in the South because that's where the organization's headquarters is—the heart of the Black nation, as you always say." He was sitting on a box in the living room and grabbed my arm as my pacing took me within his reach. "But if you don't want me to go, I won't. I don't feel right leaving, with you pregnant and all."

"No, I want you to go."

He tilted his head and squinted at me. "Really?"

I tried to sound convincing. "You need to go and the organization needs you.

Besides, it's only for a month, right?"

After hearing all kinds of horror stories about how hospital staff interfered with natural labor and birth because it was more convenient for the doctors and more profitable, I was sure I wanted a home birth. I trusted the midwife who would never pressure me into an unnecessary Caesarian Section or even anesthesia that would leave our baby drugged the first hours of his life. To ensure a safe homebirth, the midwife recommended a class that focused on including fathers as full partners in labor and delivery. The class would teach us to work together rather than depend on hospital professionals and procedures that typically excluded fathers. I found a class in downtown Oakland and reserved a place for us in a session that would begin meeting at the Oakland YMCA, starting in March.

"That's what they said. A month." He sighed. "I promise, I'll be back in a month."

"That means you'll be home in plenty of time for the childbirth preparation class, right?"

"I can easily take care of myself for a month." I pointed out calmly.

He hugged me and rose to go. "I gotta pick up a few things for the ride. The brotha will be picking me up tomorrow."

I nodded and managed a smile. But, as soon as he left, I began pacing again.

Finally, I grimaced and kicked an unpacked carton. "This is ridiculous," I scolded myself. "I need to stop wasting time and get this place in shape." I began to push the cartons I needed to unpack first into the left corner of the room. Then I realized I could not make any progress unpacking until I had set up some shelves and found a desk. As I drove to the lumber yard, I fought with my fears and resolved to use the time Mali was away to find a job and to reconnect with women friends.

I was at a meeting to figure out how to raise money for Vietnamese reconstruction when the car of brothers driving across the country arrived to pick up Mali. When I returned home, his note, printed in all capital letters, greeted me,

"ARLENE, COMRADE. I GUESS THIS IS IT. MEANING THE TRIP. SORRY YOU WASEN'T HERE TO SEE ME OFF. O WELL. THEY ARE HERE. SEE YOU SOON. LOVE YOU, MALI."

During the first two weeks he was gone, I immersed and exhausted myself transforming our new apartment from a storage space full of boxes into a home. Soon second-hand curtains and rugs muffled the echo of emptiness. I began collecting infant clothes from the few women I knew whose kids had already outgrown them. When the pile grew high enough to fill the portable washing machine in the kitchen, I searched the supermarket to find a soap powder with no chemicals that might trigger an allergic reaction in the baby. One of my how-to-take-care-of-an-infant books warned of the dangers of conventional detergents.

As I marveled at those clean receiving blankets, tiny pajamas that had a drawstring at the bottom in place of legs, the sweaters, leggings and combination t-shirt/shorts with snaps to facilitate diaper changing, I felt silly—as if I were trying to recapture my doll-playing childhood. Even after I had hung them neatly on the clothesline outside the kitchen window, I couldn't escape the thought that they must belong to a neighbor. Yet, not too far below the surface, I understood that my first baby wash—one of many "firsts"—would soon loom as a tedious chore. I would be isolated, abandoned, trapped in an endless cycle of changing diapers, washing clothes, and feeding a crying baby. Sitting there, alone

in the kitchen, I wrote to Meridel—for assurance. Her two-page single spaced reply arrived in record time.

"Dearest Arlene,

What are you doing? Are you having a child or aren't you? You cannot order and control it, or make it an alien stranger. You wanted this so badly and now you are subtly denying it, intellectualizing it...Can't you give way, enjoy it, just give way...This is the beauty of it. This is the energy, the consummate collective communal energy between mother and child, creator and created...How awful to think you are not going to have any time after it is born. Why you'll have the most delicious time you ever had. You are not having a child to retard your energy and accomplishments...no you are having a child, another human being, you will just start to live and give and go towards blooming...you will create each other...This is the enormous and great energy between two beings...there is nothing to fear but the smallness, the judgment. Your life will be rich, enormous, proliferating...This is the chance to see within the body of nature the great abundance, the absolute abundance, giving and nourishment...this is the revolution...You are not isolated having a baby, you're connected with everything for the first time in your life...this doesn't depend on a man—though that's nice—you are not alone. ***You will never be alone again****."*

I re-read the letter several times, and had nearly memorized the poetry of it, by the time Mali returned a week earlier than planned. When I asked him why he came home so soon, he mumbled something about "unprincipled organization," and changed the subject.

We were facing each other in bed for the first time in 22 days. I grabbed his hand and put it on the spot where I just felt the baby kick. We delighted in our new honeymoon, but not for long. Small differences multiplied. Within days, a particularly intense debate ended abruptly with him hurling personal insults and curses at me and making a beeline for the door. He slammed it shut."

We hardly spoke to each other for days after that. Neither of us could muster the generosity to make an apology or the energy to "talk it through." I catalogued a growing list of unresolved arguments that we had had and arranged to attend my first meeting of a single mothers' support group. I nodded nervously to the seven other women sitting in the

circle. Evelyn, the facilitator, had a three-year old daughter named Malaika who sat coloring quietly during the meeting. Three of the women were pregnant. We were all on welfare. When it was my turn, I introduced myself: "Hi. My name is Arlene Eisen. I'm living with the father, but I doubt he'll still be around when the baby is born in May. That's why I want to join this group. Is it OK?" I locked eyes with Evelyn.

"Of course, you're welcome here." Evelyn answered. "Our procedure is if you think you'll want to talk more at this meeting, tell us now how much time you think you'll need."

I paused before I decided. "Maybe, tonight I'll just listen. Is that OK?

"Absolutely."

Mali didn't leave and I didn't ask him to. By March, he and I had become quite adept at maintaining our unspoken, fragile truce. Then, we started attending the childbirth preparation class in Oakland. Other couples arrived holding hands, while we climbed the steps each gripping our own banister. During the first class, we all sat on mats that had been arranged in a circle. The instructor suggested we introduce ourselves by answering the question: "Say something this pregnancy has taught you so far."

When it was his turn, Mali said, "I've learned that I am very proud of my wife." He took my hand for the first time in a month. "I know she will be a great mother and I wouldn't miss this birth for the world." With those two lines he melted the emotional glacier that had grown between us. I beamed.

If I were a carpenter, and you were a lady,
Would you marry me anyway?
Would you have my baby?

Bobby Darin crooned from the radio. As my belly grew and stretched, Mali often gently stroked it, and serenaded me with his own Soul-accented version of the "Carpenter's Song." As he sang, his obvious delight and pride in my pregnancy gave me deeper confidence in our relationship.

Then, on Sunday, only a day or two before the baby was due, Mali announced we were going to celebrate Mothers' Day. My mind screamed,

I'm not ready to be a mother! But my body insisted it was weary with the weight of the huge hump-backed turtle stirring inside. The baby pressed mercilessly, constantly, leaving my pelvis sore and swollen. As he kicked inside my taut belly, I feared the stretched skin might finally rip open. I had to pee every few minutes and the baby didn't seem to leave space for my lungs to inhale enough air. I tried to explain, "Mali, I'm ready for mountain moving day, even if I'm not ready for Mother's Day."

"Call it whatever you want. I have some presents for you." He handed me a box that contained a pink cotton nightgown, made in India, neither my style or his. He reminded me,

"In childbirth class they said that during labor you'll get cold and then sweat a lot. So you shouldn't wear no flimsy thing. Remember, the group leader said to try cotton."

"It's wonderful. So thoughtful. My first Mother's Day gift. I love you."

"And here's something else. This one I made for you." He handed me a painting of brilliant colors. A gorge of aqua blue, lined by a rainbow of colors slashed through bright green, orange and chocolate colored mounds. Flashes of reds and yellows filled every white space. I studied it. "Check the back." He was excited. There, he had carefully printed a fantasy, a poetic description of the baby's painless passage through the birth canal.

Mountain Moving Day (1980)

On May 19th, the due date, I felt some mild cramps, like the ones that usually nagged before a period arrived in full force. They were nothing like the thundering labor pains I expected. Nevertheless, I called the midwife. "Come right away. You need to be checked," She insisted.

I hiked up the hill from our apartment on 25th and Mission to her office in an old Victorian at the top of one of the steepest streets in San Francisco. We had no car at the time and no money for taxis. Mali was still on crutches, not yet healed from a bad burn to his foot, so I made the trek alone. The midwife told me my cervix and the baby's position looked like he would come in about two days. "Within two days or in two days?" I demanded to know.

"That's hard to say. It could be tomorrow. It could be the day after." Voni yawned. How could she seem so blasé? I wanted her to be disappointed like me that my baby would not share a birthday with Malcolm X, Lorraine Hansberry and Ho Chi Minh.

"Go home and relax. Try to sleep now, when you can. Later you'll have no time. And, by the way, do you have the checklist I gave you?

"What list?" I panicked. Images of women dying in childbirth, bloody sheets and orphaned children filled my head. I could think of nothing else. Then through a cacophony of women shrieking in their labor, I heard Voni ask,

"Arlene, are you ok? You want me to call a taxi for you?"

"Oh... yeah. I'm fine. No, I'd rather walk. Thanks." And set off down

the hill, taking tiny, careful steps, as if my feet had been bound. This route that I had walked so many times, now seemed menacing. I feared tripping and turning into humpty-dumpty about to roll down the whole hill. Halfway down the first block I remembered the checklist. I almost knew the thing by heart: "to help every well-prepared woman be ready for a natural, healthy and blessed home birth." Yes, I had already frozen fruit juice into cubes—a tray of organic apple, a second of grape and a third of apricot juice, my favorites; sanitary napkins—for heavy, medium and light flows; diapers, cloth, of course; receiving blankets; puddle pads; clothes for after the birth, for me and the baby. I had spent many hours sorting through piles of tiny hand-me-downs before I decided on just the right outfit for our baby's first moments of life.

A sharp poke, not a kick, just above my right hip bone forced me to stop. I pressed my fingers against the spot and thought I felt a hand on the other side of my taut skin. I tried to find an arm to stroke, and whispered, "Don't worry, honey, you'll be out soon."

I resumed my slow pace down the hill, reasoning with myself. "They say, 'relax, try to rest, sleep.' The only way I get calm enough to sleep these days is by refusing to admit I am about to be a mother. Now Voni says, the birth is imminent. She's the professional. I concede. This person inside me is already pushing out. How can I relax!"

I needed someone to talk to, to massage my tense neck and shoulders and strained legs. I wondered if my lonely walk home, without a solicitous husband to support and reassure me, would turn out to herald my future as an abandoned single mother. When I arrived home, winded yet safe, my anxiety and resentment dissolved. As I opened the door, there was Mali, leaning on one crutch and using his free arm to scrub the walls of our bedroom. The bathroom was already shining without a trace of the mildew that had bloomed there over the months.

He dropped the scrubber and reached for me. "What's up?"

I hugged him. "Voni says we'll be parents in two days!"

"Good, great. That gives me enough time to make sure this place is spic and span for the new warrior. Are ya hungry? There's oatmeal on the stove."

I nodded and beamed. "Perfect. I'm not supposed to eat any more heavy meals."

I waddled into the kitchen. As I spooned the oatmeal into the bowl I glanced at the newspaper, "Mount St. Helens Erupts, Many Feared Dead," and skimmed the article. Toxic ash spread over 11 states. I lost my appetite. I knew I was about to have my own eruption. A feeling of connection to the earth's violence gripped me.

The midwife had predicted two days, so, at first, I thought the cramps that came that night were "Braxton-Hicks" contractions—what they called false labor. I was wrong. Soon, riding through waves of intense cramps consumed me. Oriseca, Voni's co-midwife dressed in a smock made from African fabric, arrived shortly before midnight. By then, I had no idea whether it was day or night. It felt like a giant turd was exerting a monster's pressure demanding to be released from my ass. All I wanted to do was push it out. Oriseca cajoled, ordered and soothed me into breathing along with her tempo instead of pushing. I remember no contractions, only the force of that humongous foreign object in my rear. My nightgown and sheets were saturated with sweat from the effort required to resist the overwhelming urge to push. I was too nauseous to even consider sucking on the cubes of frozen organic juice I had prepared.

I had arranged for a team of women friends to attend this home birth as if I had been organizing a political action, and I absolutely needed the help of each one. For hours, Luise—who had studied acupressure—held a point on top of the instep of each foot. I became totally disoriented and lost all ability to breathe or follow instructions during those rare times when she released her hold on my feet. Zelima pressed steadily on a horrible cramp in my lower back. Nancy maintained a steady supply of cool towels and Renee took photos. When I wasn't totally distracted by the pain of the pressure in my ass, Mali held my hands and made eye contact.

As the sun rose, Oriseca finally smiled broadly and announced that I was fully dilated and could begin pushing. If I could have gotten up and danced a wild celebration dance, I would have.

Instead, I squatted on the floor next to the bed. Mali stretched across the bed on his stomach so he could face me at my eye level and grip my hands. It seemed like he was sending all the strength and focus from his

karate-honed muscles and spirit through my hands and eyes into my body. I grunted with loud abandon as I discovered a wondrous strength to push the baby out. As I focused this new-found power on pushing, I felt the "monster turd" move. I had no idea how the baby I had gazed at from the outside of my belly for nine months could put so much pressure on my butt. I pushed harder. I just had to get it out. They call it the "ring of fire." That's the burning pain as my muscles pushed the baby through the birth canal and forced the baby to stretch the cervix from the size of a 12-point dash until it was wide enough for his head. The pain was excruciating, but the feeling of power and accomplishment was greater.

Finally, Oriseca spotted his head and announced,

"The baby's crowned! Push as hard as you can."

After nine hours of hard labor, I mobilized every muscle I had to bear down and, at 6:56AM, with one final push, the baby emerged. Whoosh. The feeling of release overwhelmed me, something like an orgasm. Yet, a burning pain eclipsed the ecstatic peace that usually follows orgasm.

I tore just a little bit and was proud that it hadn't been necessary for the midwife to perform an episiotomy. Still, I was disappointed that the burning pain and the anticlimax of having to push the placenta out, conspired against my impulse to hold the baby right away. As I panted, and gasped for breath, I wondered how women ever managed to give birth in a hospital, alone with strangers. Being surrounded by Mali and my sister comrades, being able to use my own bathroom and pace around our modest three-room apartment felt like a goddess's luxury compared to the dull lime green factory of a maternity ward. Nancy wrapped our baby boy in a large blue bath towel and handed the bundle to Mali. It was the first and last time I ever saw Mali weep.

❧

I was relieved that the midwife put on the baby's first diaper and later, the doctor put on the second. I was terrified that as I marshaled the force to push the diaper pin through the extra folds in the cloth diaper I would end up stabbing the baby in his miniscule thigh. I felt like a woman who had gone through labor, but was not yet a mother.

After the midwife and my friends departed with instructions that we

should rest, Mali and I lay on the bed with the baby in the space between us. Mali dozed before I did. I couldn't stop gazing at the baby. I studied his face, straining to recognize him. A thick crop of straight black hair covered his head, which was elongated from the walls of the birth canal pressing against his soft skull. He opened his puffy eyes but didn't look into my eyes until I guided his mouth to my nipple and he began to chomp and finally suck. I wanted to whisper his name, but we hadn't yet decided what to call him. Soon he fell asleep and I moved him onto my belly—which had been feeling strangely empty. The gentle pressure of his body made me feel whole again. We breathed in sync. When he stretched, I recognized the movement. "Ah, that's it." I thought. "The stretch that's been poking me the last few weeks."

We slept belly to belly until the pediatrician arrived and declared all the baby's signs normal. Then he hesitated, "Except there may be a hint of jaundice." And in response to my alarmed expression, he added, "Don't worry. Just keep a look out for yellow eyes. Or, if he doesn't pee by tomorrow afternoon, call me." As he was preparing to leave, the doctor shook Mali's hand, "Congratulations, you have a wonderful healthy young man there." Mali smiled, "Yes, he is amazing."

Finally, our new little family was alone. We dozed again. In the evening, Mali carefully wrapped the soft yellow receiving blanket around the baby, kissed him on the cheek, lifted him gently with two hands, and raised him as high above his head as he could reach. I gasped. He had the baby suspended in the air at least eight feet off the ground in a pose reminiscent of that early scene in *Roots*. Mali assumed the role of Kunte Kinte's father, faced the window and intoned towards the sky, "Behold the only thing greater than yourself." For an instant it didn't seem to matter that he performed the rite in our 1980 Mission District apartment, not a 1750 Gambian village. Fog hid the stars and moon. The baby and Mali seemed to glow together. "My two men."

"You know, Ahlene," he paused to lay the baby back down on my belly, and kissed each of us on the head. "His birth is the next best thing to revolution."

In the midst of round-the-clock nonstop feeding, diaper changing, checking for jaundice, swabbing the umbilical cord with alcohol, bath-

ing, swaddling the baby in fresh receiving blankets and ensuring a steady supply of clean puddle pads, those first days felt momentous. I felt duty-bound to document each one in my journal and take daily photos.

May 21. I'm beginning to feel more tender, attached to this baby. A fierce protectiveness becomes unconditional love...There has been so much help—more than I expected. Mali has taken over cooking and cleaning. Nancy and Peter came by with her delicious vegetarian enchiladas. So glad I haven't had to cook since before labor. Evelyn brought her favorite book—a thick hardcover by Penelope Leach about how to take care of babies. Renee arrived with the photos she had taken of the birth. Amazing.

May 22. Today our little warrior kept his eyes opened much more and I melted when he looked at me...My love for this baby is overwhelming. Still, I need sleep, so I'm gonna stop writing.

May 23. These days go by so fast. Precious. Our little warrior will never be two days old again! Until now, the baby has been sucking colostrum. Today, all my milk came in with a vengeance. I am engorged. My breasts feel like two monstrous hot steel watermelons pulling at my chest and armpits.... The baby only cries in protest when we change a diaper. He hates the cold air on his butt.... Mali plays the thumb piano and croons to him when the baby is awake and not sucking.... Mali's best side is the only one I'm seeing now...

May 24. He sucked every hour all night, yet I'm still engorged, but not so hot. Nature's symbiosis. We share diapers too. I had to use one of his when my sanitary pads ran out. He just jerked and stretched again and I see what I've been feeling for the months he was inside. We know each other. Kindred spirits. Luise came by for the first time since she performed her acupressure magic during the birth. She remarked about the labor: 'That was no baloney.'

...Hurrah! We finally decided on the name! For months, we've unsuccessfully searched through books of African names. Mali didn't want him to be named after a famous person. I didn't want him to be named after the Swahili equivalent of "born on Wednesday." For the last four days, we've been calling him "the baby" or "little warrior." I've been feeling increasingly foolish and anxious about his nameless status. Finally, a Zimbabwean comrade from the ZANU Solidarity Committee, suggested "Tongogara"—the Shona word for perseverance, and the nom d' guerre of the leader of the liber-

ation army that overthrew the white settler colonial regime of Rhodesia. We will call him "Tongo," for short. Perfect. His middle name will be "Cane," after Mali's grandfather—who faced down the Klan in Mississippi. Welcome Tongo Cane Eisen-Martin!

May 25. Mosee and Iapo, from our childbirth preparation class, and their newborn Zoweena visited today. It's the first time we've seen them since we practiced breathing in that class. A reunion of our two little families. Mali talked about how having a child makes him forget about himself and be able to get along better with me. Something for us to unify around—it's definitely shown in his practice. And he tried to assure me yesterday that he thought of us as a family. I am deeply happy.

May 26. A week since labor began and here is Tongo, six days old! The days are full of the routine of nurturing this new life. I'm excited and awed by the fact that there is everything to teach this child. He must learn EVERYTHING! .... And I am so full of love for Mali. It's like falling in love all over again. I'm so glad we managed to stay together.

May 27. Tongogara is one week old today. I cannot remember what it was like not taking care of him. Now that we have a name, we can submit the birth certificate to the Department of Health and then to the Welfare Office to make sure that the monthly check keeps coming.

May 28. Last night, just as it was time to sleep, I had an irresistible urge to cry and be held. The mother needed to be mothered. It must be my hormones rebalancing.

May 29. I planned to go see Lolita Lebron speak last night. It was her first public appearance in San Francisco since she was released from prison. Everyone who has ever supported Puerto Rican independence was going. But the pain in my bottom kept me in bed. Luckily, the infection seemed to pass by this morning. So Tongo, Mali and I kept an appointment with the pediatrician. It was our first family outing. The doctor told me I must be doing a good job because Tongo is fine, he's gained a pound and a half and his skin is better. I am a proud cow now that the doctor gave my milk his seal of approval.

June 1. Tongo's cord fell off last night. He is officially no longer a newborn. Now he's his own infant.

June 5. Tonight is my third night without sleep. I get lonely nursing Tongo all night long. Feel like a corralled cow. Mali has been sleeping through the night in the other room and doesn't wake til around six. Then he offers to change a diaper and cook breakfast. I have been so happy because he's been taking the initiative to help care for "his son" without me asking him to. But this morning when I mentioned how weary I am, he blew up. "

June 11th–Had another family outing today—to bank and food shopping. I've been taking photos every day. Yesterday's batch of photos are the first ones where Tongo's face doesn't look battered and puffy from his trip through the birth canal.

July 2. Tongo is six weeks old. For the most part, he seems happy. Yesterday, I saw him smile. It seemed deliberate. He smiled at me, for me and I glowed.

July 7. I left Mali and Tongo alone for three and a half hours so I could go to a reception for the Vietnamese Ambassador. A record. The longest time away.

July 8. Tongo smiles all the time now and studies everything with his huge wise eyes. He seems to especially enjoy playing in the bath and riding on his dad's shoulders.

July 23. Nancy and Peter babysat and Mali and I had our 1st date since parenthood. He wanted to see "Lawrence of Arabia."

July 28. Mali's depression is making me miserable again. He sits all day, staring out the window. Aug 2. I killed at least 10 roaches tonight. Oh, the joy of outsmarting a large roach...the secret to killing them is making sure their avenue of escape is closed off and not being afraid to get my hands dirty.

August 17. I am definitely having a new love affair with this baby. His smiles and laugh seem to say how thrilled he is with my affection and which, in turn, thrills me.

Reconnecting with a Family of Militant Women (1981)

Election night, November 4, 1980. Tongo and I lay in bed in front of the television watching Ronald Reagan's victory party when I should have been celebrating my 38th birthday. The announcer enthused, "With 57% of the vote counted, it looks like a Republican sweep. So far we count 23 million votes for Reagan."

Five-and-a-half month-old Tongo gurgled proudly as he pushed himself up from his stomach to a sitting position. I leaned over to kiss him and cooed, "There you go, honey. On your way to independence." At the same time, the news that 23 million people had voted for a candidate endorsed by the Klan filled me with dread. "*I don't want Tongo to grow up under those racist fascists,*" I wrote in my journal. *"Mali has been right all along. It is too dangerous to place any hope in the humanity of white workers."*

My thoughts wandered to 1968 when we had been so sure we would make a revolution inside the United States. A year later, many friends and comrades joined the Weather Underground, confident that along with the Black Liberation Army and other revolutionary organizations, we would take power within five years. Now, as I watched the Republican revelers there was no denying that we had grossly underestimated the power of our enemies. I had to admit I had no idea how or when we would ever make a revolution.

A couple of months later, as I ran to prevent my crawling son from

hurling himself down the staircase, another radio announcement floored me. "Bernardine Dohrn, leader of the Weather Underground who was on the FBI's 10 Most-Wanted List, turned herself in. In an apparent deal with prosecutors, she was sentenced to three years probation and a small fine."

Mali snickered. "If she were a sistah, she would have been sentenced to life."

I was furious at her. For years, the Weather Underground had been dormant, irrelevant. Nevertheless, to me, Bernardine's capitulation symbolized the end of an era and proved that her personal priority was to reclaim her place in the world of privileged white professionals. Mali was right again. There was no trusting white self-declared revolutionaries.

Mali had agreed to take care of Tongo during the two sessions a week I taught an Introduction to Women's Studies class at San Francisco State. "Counting time to drive there, park and drive home, I will definitely be home in three hours. And there's enough breast milk in the freezer to last three weeks," I had assured Mali.

Nearly every cent I earned was deducted from my welfare check, but I relished the chance to share ideas with a new generation of women—especially to talk to them about what I thought I had learned about racism. As a part-time temporary lecturer I had no office, not even a desk, but I did have a faculty card that granted me library privileges and entrance into the locker room adjacent to a beautiful track plunked down in the midst of a dense eucalyptus grove. Like the addicted jogger I had been before pregnancy, once I saw that track, I couldn't resist it. The next time I packed my shoulder bag full of notes and books for my class, I also stuffed in an old pair of running shoes.

That first day out on the track, I walked one lap and jogged another and then repeated my newly-discovered recipe for recovering a sense of my own strength. Although my milk-filled breasts bounced painfully as I jogged, I relaxed with each deep breath of the eucalyptus-scented air. I felt reborn. I calculated I would do a mile the first week and add a mile each week. In a month I would be back to my old four-mile routine. I suddenly glanced at my watch and the image of Tongo crying filled me with anxiety. "Damn. I'm gonna be late." I ran up the bleachers, through

SAN FRANCISCO, California, October 1980. Family photo of Arlene, baby Tongo and Mali. (OSPAAAL poster in solidarity with the people of Guinee-Bisau and Cape Verde is on the kitchen wall)

the locker room and to my car without showering.

Before I even put the key in the door, I could hear Tongo's wailing. Bracing for the battle on the other side, I paused before I opened the door.

"What's going on?" I asked softly, hoping Mali wouldn't hear an accusation.

I scanned the living room as I lifted Tongo off the floor. He stopped crying. Nothing much was out of order. The poster of Marcus Garvey still loomed over Mali's desk. A set of lithographs of Vietnamese women, a present from the Viet Nam Women's Union, filled the opposite wall. A rattle, a teething ring and a thumb piano—all effective tools for distracting a crying baby—sat abandoned on the couch. Two full bottles of freshly-thawed breast milk rolled around the floor. I sat down at Mali's desk, and eased my breast out of my bra.

"Here you go sweetie, is this what you want?"

Tongo sucked hard and fast.

Mali demanded: "Where the hell have you been? You shoulda been home an hour ago!"

Tongo let go of my nipple and began to whimper.

"Mali, please. You're upsetting the baby." I tried to keep my voice low, even.

"You've made him a brat. A real mamma's boy." He persisted. Tongo's whimper erupted into a wail.

"Mali, please. We've talked about this. You can toughen him up when he's older. Now he's a helpless baby. He needs to feel safe and loved. Loud noises scare him."

Mali lowered his voice, but not his anger. "You're spoiling him. Putting a tit in his mouth every time he cries. He don't like to drink from bottles no more."

"Do you blame him for preferring the breast?"

Mali didn't appreciate the joke. "Fuck it! Tell me why you so damned late."

Tongo returned to sucking away the pressure that had mounted against my chest. My tension ebbed. "I just went jogging for a few minutes, that's all."

Refusing to try to account further for my time away, I mumbled, "Let's talk more about this later." Then, I retreated to the bedroom, paced with Tongo in my arms until he quieted enough for me to change his diaper, put on his sweater and announced, "I gotta go get something for dinner, I'm taking Tongo with me in the stroller. See ya later." I left before Mali had a chance to answer.

A few weeks later, I had just eased Tongo into his crib when I heard on the radio, "And here is some news from Atlanta, Georgia," the announcer began with no more concern than if he had been noting a normal weather pattern.

"The body of a 12-year old boy has been found. Patrick Baltazar disappeared a week ago and apparently died of strangulation. The skeletal remains of Jeffrey Mathis, who vanished 11 months ago on March 11, 1980,

when his mother sent him to the store, were also found nearby. Counting Baltazar and Mathis, in the last twenty months, police say, twenty Black children in the Atlanta area, almost all boys have disappeared and been found dead."

"Oh my God," my mind raced. "Who were these kids? What is really going on?" I cursed the station for giving so little information. Wasn't the murder of 20 children worth more air time? I pictured anguished mothers pacing the floor, neighbors searching and calling, each time their sons came home a few minutes late from school.

The radio announcer concluded, *"A group of Atlanta parents calling itself the Committee to Stop Children's Murders has demanded that police investigate rumors that the Ku Klux Klan is behind the murders. Atlanta Mayor Maynard Jackson insists that there is no evidence that the disappearances are racially motivated."*

"Maynard Jackson," I mused. "Who the hell is paying him off? Someone was murdering Black children on the average of one per month and he has the gall to claim it's not racially motivated! Nobody, except the mothers, gives a damn. If it were white kids dying, they would have mobilized the National Guard, the FBI, the CIA, the whole fucking country."

I had planned to take advantage of Tongo's naptime to prepare for my Women's Studies class. But all I could do was pace around the apartment, and check the crib on the far end of each lap. "What can I do to help stop this genocide?" I pleaded aloud to an empty living room.

February 19, barely a week later, in Atlanta, another strangled body of a 13-year old boy named Curtis Walker was found. That night, nothing could stop me from attending a meeting to join a campaign to stop these murders. I had given up arguing with Mali about taking care of Tongo. For the sake of peace, it was much easier just to bring the baby with me whenever I left the house. So that evening, I buckled him into his car seat and drove from our Mission District apartment to The Bethel A.M.E. Zion Church in the heart of the Fillmore District. In my pre-motherhood days, I could have just grabbed my coat and purse, raced out of the house and arrived at the meeting in less than 20 minutes. Out of habit, that night, I forgot to calculate the extra time I needed to pack spare diapers, a couple of toys and to

buckle and unbuckle the baby in the car seat. As a result, I arrived at the meeting late.

I took a seat in a circle of some forty women. They smiled good-naturedly as Tongo interrupted the meeting with a chorus of "dah dah dah dah's."

"I'm sorry," I blushed, self-conscious about causing a disturbance.

"Don't worry honey," a woman about my age, wearing a nurse's uniform, touched my arm as I sat, with Tongo on my lap. "Glad you could make it." She spoke with the same Mississippi accent as Mali. A San Francisco General Hospital name badge pinned just above her ample breast said "E. Mormen, LVN."

"My name is Essie. And yours?" she whispered as she took Tongo's hand and made an exaggerated move to shake it.

A polite, but strained, smile in our direction from Yvonne Golden, the meeting's leader, silenced Essie. I nodded hello to Yvonne, who recognized me from when she represented the Black Teachers' Caucus years earlier at the Hard Times Conference. Then and now in 1981, I marveled at Yvonne's militancy, given that she was a high school principal, often at odds with the School Board. She spoke bluntly, "I don't have to tell you that if we don't do something to save our babies, no one else will."

I tightened my hold around Tongo with one arm and took notes with the other.

"I have been in touch with our sisters in the Atlanta Committee. They say a lot more children have been killed than 21 or 22. The police only count those who they find—but at least 15 more are missing." Yvonne paused to look down at her notes.

I thought I felt a collective shiver run through all of us in the room. "Goddamn them!" someone yelled out. Yvonne resumed. "And it is no accident that the month after Reagan takes office, racist violence is on the rise. Not just in Atlanta, but also in Buffalo, New York; Mobile, Alabama; and right across the Bay in Contra Costa County. The Klan endorsed Reagan and now they have training camps in 22 States. We need to educate people to take a stand against this terrorism."

Essie led a chorus of, "Yeah's" and "Tell it sister." Another woman interjected, "The media hides these murders, how do we educate people?" I nodded and shuddered at the thought of the millions of ignorant racists who voted for Reagan.

Yvonne's cool confidence relieved me. "The first step is to join the national campaign that the Atlanta Committee has launched to get people to wear green ribbons. Wear 'em all the time, to start conversations at work, church, the hairdressers, schools, hospitals—wherever we go." She handed a box of green ribbons to the woman sitting next to her. "Will you pass this around sweetie? Take as many as you can. Let's start right now." It was a start, but so much more was needed. That night we also took blank copies of a petition to collect names of people who endorsed our demand to Reagan to declare a state of emergency in Atlanta and to provide all necessary funds to support community patrols and self defense to stop the murders. A woman named Mae urged us to volunteer to contact at least one church or a union or a school to help collect signatures.

I came to the meeting to learn. I had nothing special to contribute, but I was happy to break my silence to volunteer to talk to the Women's Studies Program at SF State and to try to get the Faculty and Student Governments to pass a Resolution. After I volunteered, another woman, with long thick dreadlocks that whipped her face as she shook her head back and forth, waved her hand furiously, impatient to speak.

Yvonne recognized her. "Yes, Dameesha, go ahead."

"When we go to all these groups to ask for their support, we need some literature to give them. You know, like a brochure that says who we are, gives details about the murders in Atlanta and connects them to Reagan's racist policies and a long list of racist assaults in the Bay Area."

"Great idea Dameesha. Will you write it?"

"Sorry." She shook her head apologetically.

"Can anyone else do it?"

I looked up from nursing Tongo. Not a raised hand in sight. I noticed Yvonne smiling in my direction. Finally, she said, "I don't mean to put you on the spot, Arlene." She interrupted herself. "Oh, the rest of you

sistahs don't know Arlene. She came in after we introduced ourselves." As she pointed to me everyone shifted their gaze towards my direction. I busied myself with trying to pacify Tongo who was beginning to fuss. "This is Arlene Eisen, I know her from back in the day. She's a militant and a writer. She wrote an important book about Vietnamese women." I usually don't blush, but the heat in my face could have warmed a Chicago alleyway in winter. "Anyway, Arlene, you gotta do this brochure for us. I'm sure you'll do a great job."

My mouth was dry. I swallowed, nodded and spoke more softly than felt natural. "Thanks, Yvonne. Frankly to me it's an honor to be asked to do this work, but I'm afraid I don't know enough. And, I have no one to watch my baby in order to do the necessary library research."

Essie jabbed playfully on my arm. "What ya talkin' about?"

Then I had an idea. "I don't have the facts and figures about Reagan's cuts to welfare, food stamps, or the jobs programs. I don't have the details about Klan attacks in Contra Costa County or anywhere else. If someone gives me that stuff, then I can write it up and bring a draft to the next meeting."

"Great. Great. I have notes on that stuff right here." Yvonne answered. "I'll go over them with you after this meeting. But we don't want to wait til the next meeting to approve a draft..." So it was arranged that Essie, Yvonne and I would meet in a few days to go over my draft.

Before the meeting ended, someone yelled out, "We need a name. Right? What should we call ourselves?"

"Committee to Save the Children."

"Nah, that sounds like a missionary group."

Essie suggested, "Committee against Racist Violence—CARV, for short."

Everyone agreed and so CARV was born.

After the meeting adjourned, I struggled to get Tongo's jacket on without dropping my pile of notes, ribbons and petitions. Essie reached for Tongo.

"Thanks." Her kindness made tears well up in my eyes. Suddenly I became aware of how isolated I had been, how much I craved the support of other women, particularly Black women, who might share their experience with me in raising, protecting, and preparing my Black child to survive in this racist country.

"Well Arlene, usually I invite a couple of the sistahs over for a drink or a toke after meetings. But not tonight. I'm doing a 4AM shift for a friend. Maybe next time. OK?"

"Sure, as long as I can bring the baby with me."

"No problem. But where's the Daddy? Are you single?

"That's a long story." Tongo began to whimper. "He's tired. I better get him home. Seeya next time. Thanks for the help."

"No problem. No problem at all, sistah. Peace." And she blew me a kiss goodbye.

At San Francisco State that year, the Women's Studies Program got together with Ethnic Studies and the La Raza Student Organization to plan a day full of panels and speakers to celebrate International Women's Day. They asked me to speak for Women's Studies on a panel called "Third World Women and Feminism." I worked hard to plan that talk. I aimed to convince a mostly-white audience that Black women who spied on slave catchers, Iroquois women who refused to feed those fighting unjust wars, Latina women like the Toltec Queen Xochitl and the Vietnamese Trung Sisters were all women fighting for their freedom. No one group of women—especially not white women—held the copyright on feminism. Next, I elaborated on the strategies feminism followed in 1981. I ended the list with the mainly-white women's marches against violence called "Take Back the Night." Then I paused because I couldn't cry and speak at the same time.

"You know, as of today, in Atlanta, 22 Black children have been found dead. Murdered in the last 22 months. There are reports that the Klan vowed to kill one Black boy every 30 days. Imagine you are the mother, sister, grandmother or aunt of one of these dead children." This time pausing didn't stop my tears. *"I'm out of time now, but if you want more informa-*

tion, there are green ribbons, brochures and petitions on the back table. And please remember when you go on your next march to take back the night—that we must also TAKE BACK THE DAY for the children of Atlanta."

When the applause ended, I noticed that many other women in the room had tears in their eyes and were heading towards the table to grab green ribbons and petitions to circulate.

Around the same time, CARV decided to organize a Good Friday Service on the steps of the Federal Building to protest the murders of the Black children in Atlanta. Four thousand people showed up. For the first time in a long time, I felt good about being a part of a movement that might make a difference.

Killing Fields (1981)

The huge ceiling fan groaned as it labored to move the heavy tropical air above our bed in the only hotel in Phnom Penh that was open for business. We had just returned from a visit to Choeung Ek, one of Pol Pot's killing fields where the bones of 8895 people blanketed a huge open field that would have filled two football stadiums. Mali made a beeline for the shower. As I lay on the bed with Tongo nursing at my side, the stench of filthy clothing decomposing among the skeletal remains stayed with me. The specter of death blanketing the land possessed me.

A teenager with an AK-47 had escorted us to the mass grave. He waved his rifle in the direction of the macabre field, smiled and waited for Tam, our interpreter, to translate his words, "Don't be afraid. It's OK. Walk wherever you like. You are our friend and a writer. You must tell the world what happened here." I couldn't fathom how our host—a child when, only two years earlier, he had witnessed one of the Khmer Rouge soldiers bash in his mother's brains—maintained his sanity, let alone his grace. In the car on the way to the killing field, in a flat monotone voice, he outlined the history that led to the still-incomprehensible genocide. "They say the Khmer Rouge slaughtered two million of us, but I know it was a lot more than that. I am the only survivor of my village." Then he shared his disconcerting history lesson.

"Between 1965 and 1975, the United States invaded and occupied our neighbor Viet Nam, with up to a half million troops at a time. US administrations from both parties rained the equivalent of two-Hiroshima-sized atomic bombs per week to destroy the land and people who

supported the national liberation resistance. Still, they could not defeat the Peoples' War, so the invaders expanded their aggression. They claimed that the Vietnamese Liberation fighters were finding sanctuary in Cambodia and Laos and feared they would spread their anti-colonial struggles here. The US imperial "solution" was to wage a secret war against all of the former "French Indochina" with another fierce four-year carpet bombing campaign that killed hundreds of thousands of Cambodians; and utterly destroyed the land and the fabric of peasant society that once depended on the land.

"At first, the Khmer Rouge (Cambodian Communists who had been in exile in Paris) organized to defend the country against the US-sponsored regime of Lon Nol. When the US withdrew, the country was in chaos. Unlike Viet Nam, the Cambodian Communists had not established liberated zones or mass organizations in the countryside and had limited support in the cities.

"Nevertheless, with the Vietnamese victory over the US in spring 1975, the Khmer Rouge, under the leadership of Pol Pot, took control of the Cambodian state and renamed it Democratic Kampuchea. Immediately, they launched a militarized campaign to get rid of all "imperialist and capitalist elements" and reconstruct Kampuchea as a "purified," fanatically-collectivized agrarian society. Within weeks, Khmer Rouge troops ordered several million of Kampuchea's people who had lived in cities and towns—including 20,000 hospital patients—to join a forced march to the countryside. It resembled the Nakba in Palestine.

"All the country's urban areas became ghost towns. At gunpoint, those who survived the forced march were separated from their families, herded into agricultural labor camps to work nearly round the clock, reclaiming the land the US bombs had left in ruin. They were fed barely enough to survive. Many died of illness and starvation. Khmer Rouge cadre summarily shot anyone suspected of being a former servant of imperialism, all intellectuals, and all who protested or displayed the slightest reluctance to obey the rules. Before certain sectors of the Khmer Rouge formed their own units, defected, and invited Vietnamese troops to help defeat the Pol Pot forces, between 25 and 35% of the Kampuchean population of 7.5million were dead."

I surveyed the field of bones, looking in vain for a path. I could not muster the will to signal my leaden feet to move. There was no way to avoid walking over human bones, crushing the remains of even one of the thousands who had been shot for wearing glasses, for speaking French, for having a profession, for being an intellectual or a teacher, for complaining that they were hungry. It had been at least 22 months since the last execution, but the blindfolds knotted in the backs of those skulls looked fresh. I clung to the crazy hope that someone had survived the massacre and was hiding among the piles of bones.

I shifted Tongo to my other hip but no position allowed me to take notes and carry him at the same time. I handed Mali the baby and gingerly made my way via the shortest route to the end of the field where there seemed to be some sort of small monument. Our guide had apologized that the new government had delayed plans to build a proper memorial. During the two years since Pol Pot was defeated, the new government had to devote all its limited materials to rebuilding the hospitals, factories, schools and homes that Pol Pot had demolished in nearby Phnom Penh.

In fact, in the two years since Pol Pot fled to Thailand and the genocide ended, recovery for both the survivors and the economy proceeded tentatively. Every family had lost at least one member and many families had been entirely wiped out. Trauma stalked all social life. Still, when we arrived back to Phnom Penh and stopped at a sandwich shop, the only restaurant opened in the area, I was amazed to hear Santana singing from the shop's radio. "Black Magic Woman" had survived the genocide. Unfortunately, the textile factory nearby did not. The once-productive plant seemed like a ghost complex, with idle, silent machines stretching the length of the block-long building. "We need spare parts, raw materials, everything," our guide sounded apologetic.

Outside the factory, I noticed heaps of carcasses of cars destroyed by Pol Pot's decrees. Yet the streets were alive with people peddling their bicycles, each one adorned with pink fuchsia and yellow pom poms and seat covers crocheted with the same bright wool.

Finally, back in the hotel room, while Tongo napped, I jotted down some notes for a report that might shed light on how this country, where

most of the monks and medical workers had been murdered, was struggling to come back to life. In fact, news that there had been a genocide in Kampuchea had only trickled into the West. Those of us who had learned that the US corporate media reported primarily what served US imperialist interests, hardly believed their sporadic reports of the atrocities committed by the former revolutionaries. I had not planned, nor was I prepared, to become a Kampuchea reporter.

Several months earlier, I had written to my old comrades at the Viet Nam Women's Union that my book was out of print and Peoples' Press had dissolved. ZED Press offered to put it back in print on the condition that I include a new final chapter that reported on the progress of Vietnamese women in peace time since 1975.[15]

Upon arrival in Hanoi, our Vietnamese hosts quickly informed us that there had hardly been a time of Peace since the victory over the US. In 1979, China had briefly invaded the northern provinces and Pol Pot had invaded in the southeast. Those border provinces were still tense, in a state of perpetual alert. The Women's Union had made arrangements for me to visit those provinces as well as Phnom Penh so I could have a better understanding of developments since 1975. It was an offer I couldn't refuse, although I tried to let them know that with a new baby and little grounding in those issues, I could not take responsibility for a major new writing project. I didn't mention aloud but I also doubted my report or, even several reports, would arouse anything like the mass outrage, or even interest, that once fueled the huge anti-war movement in the States.

When the Women's Union invited me to visit, I planned to travel alone with Tongo. He was only 13 months old and still easily comforted or distracted. Besides, they had written that they would assign a childcare worker to travel with us. When Mali let me know that he wanted to join me on the trip, I agreed. I managed to raise the money for his plane ticket and the Women's Union was happy to host him. I hoped sharing the experience, which was bound to be politically inspirational, would give us new ground on which to reinforce our wobbly relationship.

15 In the end, the first half of the book ZED published, *Women and Revolution in Viet Nam* (1984), included the most important parts of *Women of Viet Nam* (1975) and, in the second half, an entirely new discussion of the continuing struggles of Vietnamese women after the victory over the US.

A knock on the door interrupted my writing. "It's me, Tam." Our guide had arrived. Mali reached for the doorknob, opened the rickety slab of woven bamboo, and shook Tam's hand. Then with an amiable magnanimity, "How's my Kampuchean brotha doin'? Look man," he continued talking to Tam as if they were old friends, "I'm really sorry I can't make it to the orphanage today. I don't feel too well. Maybe some other time."

Tam looked worried. "Do you need a doctor, comrade?"

"No no. Just some rest. You and Ahlene and the baby go. I'll be fine."

In the car on the way to the orphanage, I handed Tam a list of carefully hand-printed questions he had asked me to submit before our interview with Hun Sen, the new Foreign Minister. Tam seemed concerned. "Are the questions of Comrade Mali in this list? I promised the Foreign Ministry I would deliver them today. They need two days to go over them. They are especially interested in improving relations with our Black comrades in the US"

"Yes, of course, Mali's questions are here too." I noticed Tam glancing at a worn copy of the *Black Liberation Journal*. He had been reading it off and on during our visit. I was about to ask him for some background on the orphanage we were going to visit when he asked me, seemingly out of the blue, "What is the F.B.I.?" My answer surprised him. "I know, comrade, you speak the truth. Are you really saying that the United States of America is not a democracy, that it's more of a dictatorship like we had?"

Then it was my turn to be surprised. I had assumed Tam, an English-speaking official from Foreign Ministry of the Peoples' Republic of Kampuchea would have been well-versed in the truth behind the US liberal democratic façade. Then, on second thought I connected the dots. Probably only a handful of educated anti-imperialist political cadre had survived the genocide—and even fewer who spoke English. A new, very young generation, that only came of political age within the last two years, was available to staff the new government. In fact, Hun Sen, the Foreign Minister I would soon interview, was only twenty-six years old when he took office.

Koi Kim Lon, the orphanage's director, was the oldest survivor we met during that week in Kampuchea. She appeared to be in her forties.

She had been a teacher before the Pol Pot takeover. During the genocide, she lost her three children, her husband, her parents and eight of her 11 siblings. She survived by hiding her identity and obediently following orders. She worked 16 hours a day converting excrement into fertilizer. "Now, I have a bigger family to love," she motioned to the crowd of children who were jostling to greet me and Tongo.

There were 145 children at Khet Kompong Speu orphanage, all between the ages of three and 16. The 18-member staff included teachers, a cook and a driver, the director told me. "But no nurses," she pointed out. "Not many survived Pol Pot and the few who did are needed to staff our new hospitals. We hope some of our older students will get scholarships to go abroad to study and come back to us. We have no medical schools or hardly any doctors left here."

Then she brightened, as she led me into a long thatch-roofed structure, with mats lined in neat rows on the floor and an easel holding a blackboard at the far end of the space. The interior was dim, lit only by whatever sunlight might enter the doorway and single window. "Our children came here thin and pale. Many had to go to the hospital. But now you see they've gotten fat. They've come back to life thanks to the United Front for the Salvation of Kampuchea and our socialist allies."

She continued her prepared speech. "All the children learn to read and write here. You know Pol Pot forbade all reading and religion. All education, even literacy, was forbidden. We also teach our children morality and train them how to grow rice and vegetables. We need everyone to farm because the land is destroyed from the war. Starvation is still a threat."

I asked her what she meant by teaching "morality." She explained that when the orphans first arrived, they were traumatized, "very very unruly, very angry, a bunch of little law breakers. Now look at them!"

Indeed, they looked healthy, busy digging land, planting flowers, collecting rainwater in buckets, and playing with Tongo. "They are no longer sad," she continued. "Sometimes distant relatives who we didn't know had survived, appear to take a child home with them. The children don't want to leave here, where they know they are very safe."

I would have liked to learn more about their methods for coping

with post traumatic stress, to speak more with the children and the other staff, but Tam insisted we leave. The midwife who was the director of the nearby hospital was expecting us. It was wrong to keep her waiting much longer. The newly reopened provincial hospital had 300 beds, I was told there were 103 staff, but no physicians and only one nurse. The facility was a series of unlit sheds. The only electricity available came from a single shoe-boxed sized Honda generator in the operating room. Mostly they aimed to treat malaria and injuries from US landmines that still blanketed the countryside.

Early in the morning on the day I was to interview the Foreign Minister. , I reviewed the list of 14 complicated questions I had prepared for the interview with Hun Sen. In case this visit turned out to be 15 minutes squeezed between his more pressing appointments, I needed to pick out one or two of the most important questions. Again, Mali told Tam, he wasn't feeling well enough to attend the meeting but that he would take care of Tongo while I went. Tam only nodded.

A lean, but muscled, young man wearing eyeglasses, dressed plainly, in black cotton pants, sandals and a short sleeved white shirt, like most men I had seen in the city, greeted me when I arrived at a reception area. He ushered me into a large, elaborately decorated auditorium. Only one other young man occupied the huge room. After my escort took a seat in the first row, and motioned me to sit in the same row, with a couple of seats between us, he finally introduced himself. "I am Hun Sen, Foreign Minister of the Peoples' Republic of Kampuchea. You are welcome." Then he summoned the other man, an interpreter, to move closer to better hear the translation.

I was shocked. Although I had read that he was the youngest Foreign Minister in the world, I didn't expect to meet this man who looked like he was in a high school play, perhaps rehearsing the role of foreign minister in an Asian country. He began: "Our Vietnamese friends told me that you are an honest journalist, a comrade from America. I have reviewed your questions and will do my best to answer each one." I recorded his translated words quickly, thankful that the Foreign Minister waited for me and the interpreter before he began each new statement.

HANOI, Viet Nam, September 1981. Madame Nguyen Thi Binh, was the Foreign Minister of the Provisional Revolutionary Government of South Viet Nam. After reunification she was Minister of Education of the Peoples' Republic of Viet Nam, and later Vice President. She is pictured here with Arlene and baby Tongo.

HANOI, Viet Nam, September 1981. General Nguyen Thi Dinh, Deputy Commander of the Viet Nam Peoples' Army, President of the Viet Nam Women's Union and after reunification,Vice President of the Peoples Republic of Viet Nam (1987-1992), poses with Arlene and Tongo after dinner.

He methodically repeated the number and phrasing of each of my questions before he answered. It took him nearly an hour to answer the first five questions which explained the limited role Pol Pot had played in the war against US imperialism, and how he had maneuvered into power despite his lack of political base. Hun Sen emphasized that Pol Pot had shrewdly assassinated many of the Communist cadre who opposed him even before he took power. I checked my watch, but this high government leader brushed aside my concern for his time.

"Your question seven is important. 'If Pol Pot could be defeated so quickly in 1978-1979, why was he able to terrorize the population during the three proceeding years?' He read and smiled.' Remember this, comrade, the more Pol Pot violently suppressed the people, the more they wanted to resist. This is a slogan that applies worldwide. When one family member is killed, the rest of the family wants revenge. When Pol Pot murdered three million, the whole nation took revenge."

I also asked about the country's recovery since his forces, with the aid of Viet Nam, drove Pol Pot out of the country two years earlier. "When we entered the city January 8, 1979, only 70 people remained in all of Phnom Penh. There were no lights, no water. In short, the city was dead. Now, two years after liberation, a half million people live here. The revival is miraculous. No one would have guessed it was possible. We have enough rice to feed our urban population. You have seen our clinics, schools and workshops all humming again. We repaired the water pumps and have begun to restore electricity."

"Comrade Ho Chi Minh promised his people while the Americans were still destroying everything they loved and needed for survival, 'We will rebuild our land ten times more beautiful.' It is the same here. In addition, US imperialism and China are still trying to destroy our new Peoples' Republic of Kampuchea. History has taught us to avoid war but we will accept war to defend our native land if the invaders return. The current rebirth of Kampuchea is irreversible."

I was especially interested in his response to my question about how they were healing the social and psychological wounds of genocide? The trauma seemed overwhelming. The question energized him. He urged, "Remember, Pol Pot's ideology that workers in the city were enemies of

people in the countryside and that the only way forward was for everyone to become equal as rural workers with no loyalty or social ties to family, class, religion, ethnic group or village. Pol Pot's organization demanded total loyalty. He poisoned and divided the people.

"We needed a political line that would rebuild solidarity among the people. In our United Front all strata respect each other and work together to reconstruct their capacity to love, trust and recover their human rights. This is the basis of our optimism for the future."

After nearly two hours, he underlined his optimism with an invitation to return when my child was grown. "You'll see for yourselves what social and political solidarity can achieve." Then, as he escorted me to a waiting car, he invited me and my husband to attend a dance concert that night that had been organized to honor a visiting Cuban Minister.

Both Tongo and Mali were napping by the time I returned to the hotel. I regretted that he hadn't had a chance to meet a man who was important to shaping this country's future. In fact, Mali and I had shared little of our time in South East Asia.

Our constant bickering, even shouting matches, exhausted and defeated me. I had hoped our travel and work together would heal our wounded relationship. Instead, rather than take the unique opportunity to visit the ancient Temple of Angkor Wat or the idyllic beaches of Phuket in Thailand—a famous honeymoon destination for well-heeled Europeans, I decided we had to return to San Francisco as soon as possible. I resolved we would separate as soon as we got home.

In San Francisco, the resolution to separate from Mali proved easier to make than to keep. We maintained a truce of tense silence. I slept in the bedroom with Tongo and Mali slept in the living room. I settled into a routine of dropping Tongo off at childcare, working with my notes from our trip to Viet Nam and Kampuchea, shopping for food and then picking up Tongo from childcare. While I worked in the bedroom, for hours, Mali sat, in his usual pose, in the living room, listening to music, his chin in his palm staring out the window. At times I tried to coax him out of his desolate mood. Neither of us had the will or understanding of how to recover his taste for life, let alone our love.

Each day, after childcare, when I opened the apartment door, Tongo waddled into the living room, grabbed Mali's leg, and whined "Da Da Da," until Mali picked him up. Tongo beamed and Mali momentarily smiled. On those evenings when Mali left the house early to "take care of some business," and Tongo didn't find his Daddy in the usual place, he sobbed uncontrollably. To me, the prospect of Tongo's misery if he never found his father home again was unbearable.

After a few weeks, without an argument about childcare or money, I began to feel a glimmer of hope. He even showed some interest in my work. Thus, our next conflict caught me off guard. Tongo was napping, when Mali interrupted a relatively routine debate by hurling insults at my attempts to write something about Kampuchea. I defended my work and he stormed out of the apartment.

I had no idea when he would return: it might be in 10 minutes, it might be the next day. At those times that he disappeared overnight, I never suspected he was having an affair. Rather, I panicked that he had had a run-in with a cop that landed him jail or the hospital. When he did return, I was so relieved that he was safe, I didn't question him. This time, I decided to leave as well. I went into the bedroom and methodically began stuffing diapers, Tongo's clothes, and my clothes into the largest backpack we had. I rolled Tongo's bedding inside my sleeping bag and filled another backpack full of toys, my notebooks, apple juice and rice crackers.

To be fair, I thought I should not disappear without leaving a note: "We're on our way to visit my friend in New Mexico. I need a break. I'll call you when I can. Take care, Arlene"

For two days I sped through desolate highways, with no adult conversation except for the scenes with Mali that I replayed in my head. I lectured myself: be proud that you finally made this move. Then the doubts nagged: exactly what move did I make? Did I want to leave for good or just for a break? Speedy from too much coffee and driving over the limit, I was skittish when I finally arrived at the outskirts of Albuquerque and found the address Zelima had given me. A huge god's eye—maybe two-feet square—woven from fading purple, orange, yellow and black yarn,

dangled in the front window. Discarded ceramic pots and sculptures of women with cracked breasts and mutilated faces bordered the walkway through the front yard.

As I struggled to lift Tongo out of his car seat without waking him, Zelima appeared in the doorway of her ramshackle house and hurried towards us. She looked like she did the day I had first met her some eight years earlier when she interrupted my Women's Studies class at San José State. She remained braless in her baggy t-shirt and jeans. Like a construction worker, strong muscles defined the deep tan skin of her arms. The long straight black hair she inherited from her Venezuelan *Indígena* mother still flowed down below her butt.

"Hey sister. Welcome to Medicine Wheel." She reached for me but I was still occupied with the car seat. "You hungry? We saved you some dinner." She nudged me away from the car. "Wait, I'll do that. Let me help you. Haven't you learned how to work that car seat yet?"

With one swoop she pulled Tongo out of his seat. He began to wail. She elbowed me away when I tried to wrest him away from her. "Don't you remember? I raised two kids of my own. Now I have four grands. Let me deal with him. You go inside."

The prospect of having a meal served to me and my son taken care of by someone else pierced through my over-worked-single-mother's armor. An unfamiliar sense that I might relax washed over me. I relished the prospect of being mothered. The fantasy of raising Tongo in a supportive women's community filled my head.

As I entered her living room, the aroma of burning sage brought me back to a time before I met Mali, at her home in San Jose. More than five years passed before I saw Zelima again. That was when I spotted her as I waited in line at the bank on Mission Street. She laughed when my huge pregnant belly got in the way of a hello hug. "Arlene, what are you doing?"

"I'm cashing my welfare check."

"No, I mean. Look at you. How did you end up pregnant? When are you due?"

We talked and talked. I told her about Mali and she told me that she

and Helen had divorced. Then she asked me if she could attend my baby's birth.

"Of course."

I had often thought of Zelima as heir to the knowledge of a long line of healing witches. During my labor, her steady hand pressing at the small of my back felt indispensable for the hour I squatted and pushed Tongo out. A few days later, she came to say "goodbye" before she moved to Albuquerque. It was then that I asked her to be Tongo's godmother.

"I will be honored to be his *Madrina*," she said and bowed.

Now, Tongo was 17 months old and his tears gave way to giggles as she bounced him to the rhythm of a ditty,

"Tongo gordo

feo y malcriado.

Tongo gordo

feo y malcriado."

"Who you calling a fat, ugly brat!" I smiled as she waved me deeper into the house.

"*Mi casa es tu casa*," She announced unnecessarily. I already felt at home.

I scanned the living room cluttered with two old couches, the drums, a washtub bass, overflowing book cases, a massage table and another long table covered with jars full of herbs. "Where should I dump my stuff?"

"You can leave your stuff in my room. Both my roommates have guests, so we're kinda tight right now."

It didn't take long for me to realize that Zelima's home could not provide me with the sanctuary I thought that I needed. After a couple of days of discouraging Zelima's romantic advances, and a couple of nights of sleeping fitfully on a lumpy couch I decided to head back to San Francisco.

For the first six hundred miles, the drive home seemed to go faster. As I drove into the brilliant glare of the western sunset, I considered try-

ing to make it home in one day. First, I needed to give my burning eyes and aching shoulders a rest. I pulled into a truck stop. After filling the tank, scrubbing the dead bugs off the windshield, I looked forward to treating myself to some homemade blueberry pie a la mode.

I scanned the dining area of that desert truck stop near the California border. The muscles in my chest knotted. I was the only woman and Tongo was the only Black person in sight. Refusing to make eye contact with any of those men who stared at us, I held Tongo close to my chest as I made my way to a small table towards the back. I planned to order some coffee and pie, maybe call Mali, and get the hell out as soon as I could. "Well, honey, what you think? Should I call Daddy?"

"Da Da DaDa." He answered.

With Tongo on my hip, I scowled my way through a gauntlet of staring white men. No one said a word. The seductive aroma of fresh-brewed coffee barely penetrated the thick fog of cigarette smoke. A country song, by Kenny Rogers, I think, played on the jukebox as I handed the cashier a ten-dollar bill for the pie a la mode and asked for my change in quarters. I figured the fistful of quarters she handed me would pay for six or seven minutes of a long-distance call.

"...And I don't need you, baby

And I know you don't need me"

"And we don't need each other, baby

We don't need each other, baby

Or do we?"

Oh, no, I thought. Don't end there. I wanted Kenny Rogers to make a resolute decision.

I found a bank of phone booths and chose the one in the very back, furthest from the truck stop's restrooms. I didn't want the conversation I was about to have with Mali interrupted by the sound of flushing toilets or Kenny Rogers. I balanced Tongo on my lap, arranged the quarters in neat piles of four and finally began dialing. Before I completed the number, a recording interrupted, telling me there was no direct dial to a 415 number. I needed operator assistance. "Damn." I thought. "Maybe I

should get more quarters. No, on second thought, this should be enough. I just want to let him know we're ok. I'm not ready for a long conversation on the phone anyway." On the fifth ring, Mali finally answered. "Yeah? Who's this?" He sounded like I woke him up. The knot in my chest tightened. I braced myself. I wavered, about to hang up, after he mumbled a round of curses. It must have been around five in the afternoon. Why was he asleep at that hour?

"Hello?" My "hello" sounded tentative. Not upbeat and confident as I intended.

"Ahlene! Is that you?" I detected no anger, but was still afraid to let down my guard.

"Yes. How are you?"

"How am I? How am I?" He paused. The knot in my chest sunk to my stomach. "Well, to be honest, I been scared as hell."

"Scared?"

"Yeah, Ahlene. I was really scared you weren't coming home. Will you please come home? Please?"

I didn't trust what I had just heard. Was he really pleading? Impossible. I had never heard him sound so vulnerable. I had tried to prepare myself for his anger, for an interrogation, a tirade. I couldn't throw my emotional armor off fast enough.

"Ahlene. Did you hear me? I need you. Please come home."

I caught my breath. "Mali, yes I hear you. Actually, I'm on my way home."

"Yes! I was afraid I would never see you or Tongo again. I need us, my family."

The operator interrupted. "Please deposit another..."

I cut her off with the plinking sound of another four quarters dropping into the slot. The interruption gave me just enough time to regroup.

"Mali, I've been thinking a lot these last two days."

"So have I. So have I. Ahlene, baby. I love you. Tell me what I gotta do to keep you."

I was tempted to rattle off the long list of conditions I had thought about each time I vowed to end the relationship if he didn't change. Instead, I spoke softly into the phone, "There's a lot both of us need to do. But let's not try to do this on the phone. I'll be home soon."

"How soon?"

"I don't know exactly. I think I have about four or five hundred miles left to drive." Suddenly I felt drained, to drive through the night seemed impossible. "I guess I'll be there around this time tomorrow."

I heard him exhale. "Good. That'll give me enough time to clean up around here and cook you a welcome-home dinner."

"Sounds good." I didn't trust myself to say anything more.

"OK, I'll see you tomorrow. I love you, baby and give Tongo a kiss from Da Da for me."

Without thinking, I said, "I love you too." And hung up. The knot inside me unraveled. I kissed Tongo and whispered, "We're gonna see Daddy soon."

Back in the car, I mechanically buckled Tongo into his car seat, turned on the ignition and drove slowly towards the on-ramp. My words, "I love you too," echoed. I winced at the thought that I had betrayed myself again. I hit the steering wheel in disgust. I put on the directional, prepared to make a u-turn, to call him back and say I wouldn't be home so soon. I needed more time away.

Then, before my thoughts could ping pong again, I turned the wheels once more towards the on-ramp and accelerated hard. No, he meant it. He really wants us to be a family. He's finally ready to change. We'll make it work this time.

By midafternoon the next day, an announcer's voice replaced static from the radio's speaker. We were close enough to San Francisco to hear the news on KCBS radio—loud and clear. I welcomed the distraction of the sterilized corporate news, even though I never listened to it at home. I had already rehearsed a speech I planned to deliver to Mali. I needed something else to think about. Then a news bulletin made my anxiety over the reunion with Mali seem trivial.

"This just in from our bureau in New York. After a botched attempt to rob a Brink's truck in a suburb north of New York City, a shootout left one of the Brink's drivers and two policemen dead. The getaway driver has been captured. Although her identity has yet to be confirmed, she is believed to be Weatherman fugitive Kathy Boudin. One of her accomplices, a Black man, died at the scene, the others escaped. Police are confident of their capture. Stay tuned for more details to come."

"Oh No!" I yelled, Tongo woke, looked around and closed his eyes again.

I had a crazy thought to wake him up again to tell him about Kathy, who I had once loved, and why this news was so terrible. I hadn't seen her in years, but on the rare occasions when I regretted my estrangement from old movement friends, I thought of her. She was a brilliant, assertive woman, who always spoke her mind—even before the women's movement gave women the courage to speak out. I couldn't imagine her involved in some scheme to rob an armored car unless she was involved with a new underground organization. Hopefully, the police had made a mistake. The woman they captured could not have possibly been Kathy. Who were the others involved? I needed to get home right away, contact old friends with ties to KPFA who would have more information.

Mali opened the apartment door before I finished turning the key in the lock. He stretched his long arms around me and Tongo and hugged us fiercely. Then he eased Tongo out of my arms and held him high. "Let's see, my little man. Have you grown?" He brought Tongo's belly to his lips and blew until Tongo giggled uncontrollably. While Tongo was still giggling, Mali shifted, cradled Tongo in one arm and reached for me with the other. Seeing Mali as a playful, attentive father dissolved my fears.

Without thinking about my list of conditions or resolutions, without weighing whether to allow him to touch me, I found myself kissing him. With our kiss, I thought we were both saying, "all that mattered was that our family was reunited."

We kissed until Tongo's demands for "apple goose" interrupted. "I'll get it," Mali offered. "Are you hungry too? I made your favorite shrimp with ramen. It's on the stove."

"That would be great. But first I need to find out what's going on with Kathy."

"Kathy? Kathy who?"

"I'll explain in a minute. I just need to make a call."

"Sure." He turned to Tongo. "Hey, little man, let's go get that apple juice. Maybe I can even throw in a cookie."

"That's too much sugar at one time." I called out and then bit my lip. Usually, Mali met any attempt on my part to control what he fed Tongo with an angry rant. "Don't you dare tell me what to do with my son. We don't take white folks' orders no more." But this time he nearly sang back, "Sure you're right. Sorry. I just thought we would celebrate."

I couldn't reach anyone who had news about the New York bust and joined my men in the kitchen. Tongo was rubbing his eyes. I reached for him.

"I think he needs a nap. Maybe I should nurse him til he's ready for the crib."

Mali nodded, stood behind me and the baby. "Ahlene, you must be tired too. From all that driving." I felt his hands gently kneading my shoulders. "You wanna back rub."

"Of course. As soon as I put the baby down."

After I slowly lowered Tongo into his crib, Mali took my hand. "Now, will you let me take care of you?"

"Sure." Through many months of pregnancy, I had begged Mali to massage my aching back. On the few occasions he did comply, he did so grudgingly. Now, I delighted in his offer.

That afternoon, for the first time in months, we made love. Slowly, at first tentatively, taking time to remember what we had lost. Finding new ways to tell each other with our bodies, "You can trust me. I love you. I trust you." We would talk tomorrow, I told myself, before I fell asleep with my head on his chest.

The next morning I found Mali in the living room, sitting on the window seat, chin in his palm, staring out the window. "No, not again," I thought. "Not so soon." With the echo of his voice in that truck stop

call, "tell me what I gotta do...I need us, my family;" with our beautiful reunion only a few hours ago, I expected to have a serious talk today. I could not give up my plan so suddenly. . ."

Nevertheless, his rejection of my proposal came with the familiar flurry of curses and verbal abuse. My response felt both surprising and rehearsed,

"No, you get lost. I left, and you begged me to come home. Remember? Now it's time for you to leave. I've had it with this shit." I marched back into the bedroom and slammed the door.

During the following weeks, he stayed at a friend's house. When he came back to the apartment for clothes or to check the mail, we hardly spoke. He ignored Tongo. I had no energy, and often felt like I needed to weep. At first, I thought these were the physical symptoms of depression over our separation, but when my period did not arrive on time, I called Essie, my friend from CARV, the Coalition organized to save Atlanta's children. The next day, I met her at San Francisco General where she worked as a nurse in the Family Clinic. She handed me a small plastic cup. "Here, pee into this, sweetie." I obediently returned from the restroom with an ounce or so of piss and watched Essie add the chemicals to it.

As the liquid in the cup remained milky, I sat down and wept. The prospect of taking care of two babies on my own weighed more than I thought I could carry. Essie handed me a tissue. "It'll be ok. I know you need more than a hug, but let me give you one anyway." I wiped my eyes, cleared my throat and I smiled. "I'm so glad you're the one to give me the news. Thank you so much." My face felt hot and tight. I wanted to let Essie know I could be strong, like the thousands of women on welfare who came through that clinic. I would manage.

"Let's see," Essie touched my arm. "Let's figure out when you're due. When was your last period?"

"No need to calculate from there. I know the exact date this baby was conceived. October 20th, the day my friend Kathy was arrested and the last time we made love." I counted on nine fingers, "October, November, December, January, February, March, April, May, June and stopped at July." This baby will come in July.

Biko Prevails (1981)

During the hours after Essie showed me the test results, the prospect of taking care of another baby added to my nausea. The thought of being alone with two kids terrified me. How could I rock and nurse a newborn infant and hold a wailing two-year old at the same time? How could I dress Tongo before the newborn began to cry or nurse the newborn before Tongo lost interest in knocking down a pile of blocks and began climbing on my back? I knew there were millions of women who had raised even more kids on their own, but I imagined myself as a revolutionary, a writer, teacher, traveler.

Then Tongo's glowing face eclipsed the fear, shutting off the worry. "How good it would be to have another child like him—an ally for Tongo, a brother or a sister, a family—not just a lonely mother and son locked into each other.

On one of Mali's rare appearances during our separation, he brought his friend Fred with him. Ordinarily I would have waited until we were alone to give him any personal news, but I had no idea when I might see him again. He gave me a disapproving glance as a new wave of nausea sent me running to the bathroom, I blurted out, "I'm pregnant."

"You're what!" I heard him yell back at me.

Buoyed by a sense of post-vomit relief, I returned to the living room composed enough to announce I was making tea. "Do you guys want any?" I tried to smile at both Fred and Mali.

"Hell no," Mali demanded. "Whaddya mean you're pregnant?" I repeated the facts.

"How can you be sure it's mine? Are you sure it ain't Brother Fred's here? Or maybe some dude you met on your little excursion to Albuquerque?" I struggled against humiliation and fury to drag myself out of this grade-B movie scene, and refused to take his bait. "How do you feel about having another baby?" I asked evenly. Without pause, as if he was telling me I needed a shower, he responded, "Get an abortion, woman." Then he nodded to Fred and pointed to the door. Fred managed a polite smile and the two left. There was no "goodbye."

Two years earlier Mali had erupted into a delighted jig when he heard I was pregnant. That fleeting image provoked me to question, "what did I do wrong?" I knew I had to wait until the sixth week of pregnancy before I could terminate it, but I didn't know how long I'd have to wait for an appointment. I hardly felt my fingers dialing the number Essie had given me for the Family Planning Clinic at San Francisco General. As I waited for the operator to transfer me, I imagined the sparkling eyes of the baby growing inside me and hung up. Rather than re-dialing the Clinic, I looked for Meridel's number. As a single mother, she had raised two daughters during the Depression while writing, interviewing women on breadlines, and struggling with her comrades in the Communist Party.

The next day, I drove north across the Golden Gate Bridge towards Graton, where Meridel was staying with Deborah, her daughter. In mid-span, a new wave of morning sickness hit me. Without anywhere to pull over on the Bridge, I glanced at Tongo sleeping peacefully in his car seat, grabbed the diaper bag sitting next to him and positioned it on my lap in case I began retching before I could pull over. I held my breath hoping to postpone the inevitable, sped up and managed to reach the Vista Point turnaround without heaving up all over the front seat. I yanked on the parking brake before the car came to a full stop, flung the door open, leaned over and breakfast and last night's dinner came spewing out. Still panting, I cleaned up with Tongo's booty wipes, gobbled a few mints and put the car in gear. Tongo had slept through it all. As I pulled back onto the freeway, I weighed various explanations for my body responding to this pregnancy so much more violently than before. Not enough exercise? Who had the time or energy to swim every day as I had the first time around? Too many carbohydrates, not enough protein? Yet, the thought of eating anything but saltines and

baked potatoes made my stomach lurch. Too much worry? Indecision? Would it hurt the baby?

I drove the next 50 miles to Graton without incident, and arrived feeling refreshed, almost stronger. Deborah and her partner had converted an overgrown garden and old trailer into a cozy carpenter's cottage and potter's paradise. Despite her 81 years and thick poncho that barely covered the huge hump emerging from the base of her neck, Meridel greeted me with the hug of a strong mother bear and insisted on lifting Tongo out of his car seat.

"Oh, there you are, little man." She kissed his eyes. "What brilliance, what depth in those eyes. Those are the eyes of a poet or maybe an oracle. So how was the drive?" She hugged me again. "The hell with the drive, tell me about your new life with Tongo and the one growing inside." She caressed her own stomach as if it held a child. Her exuberance dissolved my need to tell her about the attack of nausea on my trip.

She ushered us to a kitchen nook surrounded by plant-filled windows on three sides. She kept Tongo on her lap, maintaining his attention with an improvised rattle of measuring spoons. Over a cup of tea brewed from fresh mint from the garden, I asked about her chronic back pain.

"Oh nothing a few aspirin can't handle. Besides, Deborah here takes great care of me. Did you see that old bear claw tub in the yard? She and Cricket fill it with hot water as often as necessary, add all kinds of healing herbs and bathe me to keep my muscles loose. I'm the cleanest old crone you'll ever meet."

Then she turned serious. "Tell me, are you really thinking about an abortion?"

Meridel listened intently to me recite a litany of fears.

"Perhaps she will be an even fiercer warrior than her brother," Meridel quipped, when I asked her about why this pregnancy felt like it was turning against me. Then she cleared her throat, her voice grew softer, but more urgent and serious. "You will be giving birth to a person, a comrade, a sister for life—not a doll. You think you will have to give up the struggle for liberation. Don't swallow that lie! Motherhood is the soil of solidarity and sisterhood."

I also sought the advice of another single mother of two who had remained active in the struggle. Nancy, "my wife" during the days I prepared for the first trip to Viet Nam, also had raised two kids by herself. Shortly before my second appointment for the abortion, I sat across her sunny kitchen table picking at a croissant. In the early seventies, we had held many political meetings in her house since she was on welfare and had no money for babysitters. I winced in shame when I recalled my annoyance with her children for frequently running into the living room, fighting, screaming, demanding their mother's attention. Now I asked her, "It must have been so hard to raise your kids when you were totally involved in the movement? Would you do it again?" She nodded. "Really, what I want to know, tell me, what do you think about me getting an abortion?"

Over the years that I knew her, Nancy maintained her cool—no matter how heated a debate or tense a confrontation. She always chose her words calmly, carefully. This skill served her well during her years managing a Planned Parenthood clinic. She had counseled countless women who pondered abortion. This time was no different. She nodded and said softly,

"I get the sense you really want this child. Of course, it makes sense to weigh the problems. But you've already made the adjustment from being childless, not having anyone but yourself to care for. You already have survived the transition to motherhood. Having a second one is not that much harder."

Every time Tongo's toddler charm, his uninhibited smile, deep brown sparkling eyes, urgent hugs and kisses grabbed me, I knew I wanted to have another baby. I never doubted that I had the right to have an abortion. I just finally decided I wanted to keep this baby.

When I was 5 months pregnant, Mali announced he was going back to Chicago to visit his frail grandmother, Mamma Clemmie. She had raised him and was now asking to see him. He bought a one-way ticket. I helped him pack. I hoped that the distance would do us both some good. A counselor I knew had frequently advised, "if you're going to stay

together, you need to forgive each other." I vowed that when he returned, I would do just that: renew my commitment to him; stop harping on how I needed more support from him—especially sharing child care. I felt obligated to the Viet Nam Women's Union and to my own political commitments to finish the book and resented Mali for not sharing that burden. I needed to lift the stress off both of us.

Not long after Mali left to see his grandmother, I received a call from my father in New York with the news that my mother was in the hospital, recuperating from a mastectomy. "With you being pregnant and all, she didn't want to upset you, but I think you should know," my Dad responded when I asked him why no one told me sooner. He agreed to buy me a ticket so I could fly with Tongo two days later. In the meantime, I searched the library and bookstores for all the information I could find on breast cancer and bought Audre Lorde's *Cancer Journals*. I planned on giving it to my mother as a gift, and managed to read most of it on the plane before we landed. Of course, I should have realized that my mother would not share my enthusiasm for the insights of a Black lesbian. She never opened the book, but she was upbeat about her recovery.

She only complained about feeling like her breast was still there. In addition, she suspected the doctor was withholding information from her. To my surprise, my usually demanding mother never insisted that the doctor tell her the whole truth. "The cancer spread to the lymph system, but the doctor said that I have a very high chance of living at least five years more," she assured herself. She cut me off when I tried to get more information from her or from the doctor. I didn't know much, but from the brief research I had done, I knew that her prognosis was not good. At any rate, five years was not very long for a sixty-year old woman. Since her mother had died of breast cancer and so had most of her aunts, I assumed there was a good chance I would inherit it. I vowed that as soon as I finished nursing the new baby, I would go on a cancer-preventing macrobiotic diet.

My mother, ever the emotional porcupine, refused to allow me to comfort her. She redirected the conversation to my pregnancy and Mali's absence. She never hid her racist disapproval of my having a baby with Mali, but insisted that now that there would be two babies, I take full responsibility to make the marriage work. In no uncertain terms she de-

manded, "Leave New York. It's more important that you be with your husband than with me." I had planned to return to San Francisco via Chicago, only not that soon.

I looked forward to a stopover in Chicago to visit Mali's family and then to fly back to San Francisco with him. We had been separated for weeks, but it seemed like he was glad to see us and proud to introduce Tongo to Mama Clemmie and his sister Jean. He smiled when the Martin women stroked my big belly and reminisced about their own pregnancies.

We stayed in Chicago a few days: long enough for Tongo to make his first snowballs and for me to visit some old friends. Mali spent most of his time connecting with his old friends. There was no time for us to talk alone. On the return flight to San Francisco, he was sullen.

Back in San Francisco, my resolutions about forgiveness disappeared in a fog of suspicion. Mali received letters postmarked Chicago but with no return address and whenever the phone rang, he would race to pick up the receiver before I could. It wasn't long before he left one of the opened letters on his desk. He must have wanted me to read it, and I did. The letter confirmed my suspicions. He had begun an affair with a woman in Chicago.

I gave him an ultimatum, insisted he leave, but any hint from him of remorse or concern for me or Tongo was enough to crack my resolve.

One day, on the down side of one of those cycles, I lost control and couldn't stop sobbing. I was hardly aware that Tongo stood unusually still in the doorway, staring at me cry. Tongo, dear Tongo, 21-month-old Tongo. "Mama cry," he stammered with his new vocabulary. Hesitantly he waddled closer, hugged and patted me. I felt even more miserable. How could I frighten my baby with the sight of his mother crying. Then, without a word, Tongo toddled out of the room. Before I could calm myself and follow, he returned, pulling Mali by his jeans, urging his father to comfort me. "Mama cry too much." Mali got the message, followed our son's example and held me until I stopped.

Again, I told myself that perhaps we can keep this family together—but no matter what, we must end these horrible battles before they scar Tongo. In my journal, I began a letter that Tongo might someday read:

Dear Tongo—When you are older, I hope you forget that you often saw me cry this year. I don't want you to have an image of me or any woman accepting abuse, crying, giving up. I promise you, and your baby brother, who will be here soon, that you will grow up in a home that feels safe, without constant conflict and tension, even if that means your Daddy has to leave. In our home I will teach you one consistent, one clear idea: even though there is a lot of sickness, unfairness and badness in the world, it is not your fault or the fault of anyone in your family. When you are older you may fight against the unfair people.

(As I wrote that letter, I wonder how old my children would be before I could effectively inoculate them and teach them to struggle against the ravages of imperialism, white supremacy, patriarchy.)

Meanwhile, as labor day with our second child neared, the tacit, but fragile, ceasefire agreement between Mali and me approached its final unraveling. I had drugged myself on a toxic cocktail of rationalizations, inertia, and denial. Towards the end, the loaded pistol he held to my head forced the issue. I reflexively dismissed the possibility of calling the cops. I was too aware of the terrifying tradition of them lynching Black men. Even if they didn't kill him, I didn't want to risk sending Tongo's father to jail. The police were the enemy. Period.

Somehow, I numbed my fear. Probably I denied the danger. I felt almost safe behind the locked bathroom door. In my head, I listed the steps I would have to take to wake and dress Tongo, grab some essentials and run away. I wished there were some kind of women's community support group who would intervene the way the Viet Nam Women's Union did when they heard about abusive husbands.

In the end, I didn't run. I could not run. I was about to give birth. The weight of the baby inside me forced me to move slowly and sit often. I had planned another home birth. Where could I go? How could I go? Besides, I could not imagine where I could stay other than in our apartment. That was where I waited for the weekly cloth diaper delivery. That was where Tongo had all his toys. That is where I had set up the birthing altar to welcome the new baby's arrival.

I stayed. The baby was due July 19. Mali had announced he would stay until his check came, July 25 and then return to Chicago. I was relieved that he was hardly ever home.

On July 4, the war zone of firecrackers on the streets echoed my worst fears. I had tried in vain to start the last chapter of *Women and Revolution in Viet Nam*, based on our visit in fall of 1981. My stomach felt so heavy, too heavy for my back to tolerate sitting long enough to type anything. The weight of the baby's head and the baby's kicks grew more insistent, harder. This baby wanted out. That night, the firecrackers joined serious cramps to keep me awake. By the early morning, the cramps felt like real labor. I called the midwife. "It's too soon," she tried to assure me. "But let's check to make sure."

The midwife predicted the baby would come 24 to 48 hours later. I was relieved Tongo was in childcare. When I got home, like before, to my surprise and relief, Mali was scrubbing the walls of the bathroom. I had planned to give birth in the living room, so began vacuuming it. Sharp cramps forced me to sit down before I finished one pass with the machine. I had bought a large rubber plant for the birthing room and managed to water it before the next cramp came. My body insisted I respect the twisting/jabbing in my stomach—recognize them as contractions, not simply cramps.

Finally, in the early afternoon, I phoned the midwife and my beloved birthing helpers. By the time they arrived, I was halfway dilated. Luise again used her acupressure skills to hold the point that kept me focused, Essie reminded me to breathe and after a while, Mali came into the room and positioned his back so I could lean on it as I bore down. Within two hours, the baby—who still didn't have a name—made his way into the daylight at 4:33PM, eight pounds, six ounces, blue, battered, and puffy eyed. After the midwife cut the cord and Essie swaddled the baby, she handed him to Mali. I turned my attention to pushing out the placenta.

The new baby waited four days before he opened his eyes. Maybe he waited because he arrived two weeks early, maybe because he sensed danger in the world he was about to see. For the first two days, he had no trouble sucking colostrum. On the third day, milk engorged my breasts. Again, they felt like molten steel watermelons about to explode inside my chest. My breasts were so swollen, the nipple was stretched to near flatness, leaving nothing for the baby to grab onto. While the baby screamed

and squealed for milk, I was consumed with the need to have him suck to release the horrible pressure inside my chest. At the same time, Tongo started crying. He needed attention, reassurance that Mama and Da Da had more than enough love for both him and his new brother.

I inhaled and exhaled the way the midwife had instructed, knowing I needed to relax if my swollen breasts were ever going to release enough milk to nourish the baby. Instead, the pain and tension radiated from my breasts around to my back, up my neck. I felt dizzy, nauseous. The room was spinning, the babies were crying and Mali was not helping. I collapsed onto the pillow. At some point, Tongo and Mali must have left for the kitchen.

When I opened my eyes, I told myself, "Take one step at a time." Step one: by gently kneading, then squeezing my breasts, I managed to express enough milk to feed the baby. Step one: done, at least for the moment. Tongo returned when the baby's screaming stopped. I cradled him in one arm, the baby in the other and we all dozed.

Within a week of his birth, I decided on a name for the new baby: Biko. Steve Biko's ideas sparked the history-changing Black Consciousness Movement and Soweto Uprising in South Africa. He had written, "The most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed." The apartheid regime assassinated him when he was only 30, but his generation's resistance marked the final turning point in the long struggle to overthrow apartheid. The same day the new baby got his name, the remainder of his umbilical cord fell off. I told myself that the coincidence meant that my new baby would, like Steve Biko, "Write What He Liked," have the courage to shape his own path towards justice.

Meanwhile, I tried to avoid Mali whenever possible. I took Tongo and Biko out for walks many more times than usual and counted the days until Mali would leave for Chicago.

Finally, on August 7, a Saturday, on the sidewalk near the Greyhound Bus Station, I tried to sound upbeat as I urged Tongo, "wave goodbye

to Daddy" and held up Biko's hand in a farewell gesture. After all those weeks of waiting, anxiously counting the days, the departure finally happened so quickly, between two diaper changes

GRATON, California, November 1982. Meridel LeSueur plays with baby Biko Eisen-Martin.

Flight and Exile (1983)

I was driving down Valencia Street with Tongo sitting on Mali's lap in the front passenger seat and 11-month-old Biko asleep in the infant seat in the back of the car. It was a few days after Tongo's 3rd birthday. We had just left Booker T. Washington Rec Center where Tongo chased Mali as he dribbled a basketball and each of them hurled the ball at the basket a few times. It was my idea for a safe family reunion.

Mali had been in Chicago for nearly a year. During those months, I discovered I could survive with two young children and keep them happy on my own. When, without any advance notice, he called from the San Francisco airport insisting that he see "his" sons, I suggested a public place.

After the basketball court reunion, our agreement was that I would drop him off at his hotel on 6th Street. Despite this arrangement, after we settled into the car, he demanded I take him to "our apartment." He insisted, "If I can't be with my sons in my own home, you can't either. If they don't need to be with their father, maybe they don't need a mother either."

During the 15-minute drive across town from Geary to Valencia, Mali's threats escalated. As I drove, he jabbed my arm, hard, with his knuckles. "You wanna act like a whore, you need to be disciplined like a whore."

I kept my eyes on traffic and my hands on the wheel. I made no attempt to answer. I knew that whatever I said would only add fuel to his fire. I also knew that I would never again return to the terror of living

with him. I plotted my escape and prayed he was bluffing about having a gun in his bag and that I could safely navigate through the punches until we arrived at Valencia and 23rd Street.

The apartment was on 25th, between Mission and Valencia. Mid-block on Valencia, between 23rd and 24th, I suddenly braked, pulled the keys out of the ignition, grabbed my purse and ran into the old Mission District Police Station. I calculated that without the car keys, and with Tongo on his lap, he would be trapped in the car long enough for me to get a cop inside the precinct to come out to help me. Besides, even if he decided to leave the car, he wouldn't get far on foot, not if he tried to take Tongo and Biko with him.

Breathing hard, but speaking clearly, I explained to the young white cop at the desk,

"A man is in my car, double-parked in front of this building. He is threatening to hurt me and kidnap my children. Please, help me."

The cop looked bored. "Lady, calm down. Who is this guy to you? What's he doing in your car?"

"He is the father of my children, but we've been separated for a year. He forced his way into my car, jabbed and threatened me."

My dilemma seemed to amuse him. "What do you really want, miss? Or is it Madam? First you claim he is kidnapping the kids, then, he's assaulting you. You know I can't charge a father with trying to kidnap his own kids." I deliberately didn't mention Mali's race. As terrified as I was of Mali, I was even more horrified by the possibility of the cop assuming the role of white knight rescuing white damsel in distress and coming out of the Precinct with guns blazing.

"I'm not asking you to arrest him. Just get him out of the car and hold him long enough for me to drive away."

Mali may have been shocked by my escape into the police station, but fully recovered his composure by the time I emerged from the station with the cop. Wide-eyed, Tongo was startled into silence as the cop ordered his father out of the car. "What's the problem, officer?" Mali asked evenly, calmly. His confidence in a man-to-man communication with the cop exasperated me. But I was also relieved that the cop clearly had no intention of using force.

"Probably nothing, sir. But I need you out of that car. You are not under arrest. Just let the lady go."

With his back to the cop, Mali gently placed Tongo on the seat, glared at me and got out of the car. I sped away. I drove west, away from my apartment, detouring every three blocks, afraid he had found a magical way of following me. My shaking hands could hardly hold the steering wheel. I knew I had crossed the border into enemy territory. This was the path I had tried to avoid for months, even after he held the loaded revolver to my head. I couldn't ever consider calling the cops against my children's father. I had refused friends' advice to get a restraining order against him. I clung to a dream that Mali would learn, change, make peace with himself and with me. Finally, I accepted there could never be reconciliation: that attempts at reconciliation posed the real risk he would make my kids orphans. My worst fear—that my children would not be able to have a normal relationship with their father—was now fact.

I had joined the enemy. I knew I could never go home again. I fled. After driving in circles for a while, I stopped at a pay phone and put out an SOS-call to a few women friends. I asked them to meet at my apartment immediately to help me salvage what I could before Mali made good on his frequent threat to "Burn you all before you see me in hell."

Those sisters promised to meet me at the apartment in exactly 15 minutes.

First, I collected what was left of the week's supply of diapers, then baby blankets, clothes, rice cakes and dried fruit. Three friends who worked with me at the Women's Building brought their van. While I nursed Biko and sang to Tongo, I pointed out the things they should pack. They loaded picture albums, baby bedding, a sleeping bag, favorite toys, and a few books. There was still room in the van, but before they could load more, I realized that with no idea of where I was going or how long I would be there. It didn't make sense to take more than the barest essentials. I only had use of the van for a few hours.

That night, Biko, Tongo and I slept fitfully on the living room floor of a couple of women who I hardly knew and more importantly, whose names Mali had never heard. I worked hard so the kids' crying would not

wake our hosts. I had a tit in Biko's mouth as soon as he stirred. Tongo slept as long as I kept my arms around him. I soothed myself, "we are safe, at least for the night." Mali had no way of tracking me to that house. Unfortunately, they had agreed to take us in for one night only.

The next day, we moved to the living room of a collective house of women who proudly joked they were giving sanctuary to me, "a refugee from the patriarchal wars." For the next three weeks, I tried to provide some semblance of normalcy for Tongo and Biko. Too afraid that Mali might stakeout their childcare center, we spent our days in the Diamond Street Playground—a lovely park in an upper middle class neighborhood. Its location at the top of a well-foliated hill allowed me to see if Mali was approaching before he might find me or the kids. Besides, he would never make a scene in public.

My days and nights were consumed with feeding the kids, playing with them, cuddling them, singing to them, rocking them—anything I could do to make them feel safe and loved. I was determined not to let their father threaten our safety again.. Near the end of the second week, Tongo began a serious three-year-old's campaign to go home. By the third week, sleep deprivation, exhaustion and his nagging cracked my resolve. I began to consider returning home, despite my fear.

First I needed to call Mali's sister Jean in Chicago. I hoped she might give me some news about her brother. Had he commandeered our 25th Street apartment, or was he still at the hotel?

"Neither, Charles is back in Chicago," she sighed. I wasn't sure I heard her correctly. How could I be sure she was telling me the truth? Maybe it was a trap.

Instead of avoiding a conversation with her, as I had always done, I spoke non-stop—recounting, for the first time to anyone, the whole story of how I had come to fear her brother. "Do you believe me, Jeanne?" I was more pleading for support than asking a question.

"Of course, I believe you. He was crazy when he got back to Chicago. The first night he was here he beat up our father. He would have killed him if we didn't call the cops."

Then, remembering how Mali had warned me to stay away from his

sisters, I asked her, "Jeanne, do you blame me for driving your brother crazy?"

"Shit, no, honey. He's been crazy his whole life. We tried to warn you when you two were living in Chicago, but you never seemed to want to talk to us."

Epilogue: Then What Happened (And What Should Have Happened?)

Twenty-seven years passed before I saw Mali again. I barely recognized the gray skeleton of the man, who lay dying before he turned sixty. To tell the story of those intervening twenty-seven years and the fifteen years that have passed since, would fill another couple of volumes.

For now, I want to emphasize in this book, although I've focused on my own experience, I never intended to imply that my struggles were rooted in my or any one individual's personal achievements or failings. Likewise, the outcomes had little to do with anyone's personal strengths or weaknesses. Rather, I drew on my own stories to demonstrate how I learned that the foundational systems of oppression (imperialism, white supremacy, and patriarchy) restrict, even destroy, our lives and how we need organized, collective action to survive and eventually liberate ourselves.

In my case, despite a nearly decade of experience in the women's movement, writing about women's oppression and even teaching "Women's Studies", I didn't think about the problem of "battered women" (aka domestic violence, intimate partner violence, or gendered violence) until 1976, as a reporter, I attended a public speak-out by survivors. From the women who broke their silence about violent abuse by their husbands, I learned that economic dependence on their husbands in their traditional patriarchal nuclear families left them vulnerable to repeated abuse. Also, their consensus was the police offered no protection. Several years later, from my own experience with an abusive partner, I learned that lack of economic resources, especially lack of alternative housing, was only

one condition that contributed to my vulnerability and immobility in the face of escalating danger. White supremacy, mixed with years of patriarchal conditioning, left me isolated, alienated, in denial, emotionally dependent on the abuser, and muted by shame and fear.

My escape was long overdue and also violated a basic principle of anti-imperialism: do not rely on the state. The state—especially its military forces, including the police—are the enemy. The sad reality is that in San Francisco, and in most places within the imperialist system, there has never been an organized revolutionary force to intervene to prevent or protect people from intimate partner violence.

In 2013, the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement first published *Operation Ghetto Storm*. It is a report that documented and analyzed how a Black person is killed every 28 hours by police and others deputized by the state. In the wake of the murder of Trayvon Martin, I wrote it to demonstrate that state murder of Black people is systemic. In the course of the research, the urgency of organizing collective solutions to "individual" problems like domestic violence became still more evident. For the report, Thandisizwe Chimurenga suggested a basic assumption of our analysis: *The traditional patriarchal narrative tells us that women are the "weaker sex" in need of protection. But for Black women that narrative abruptly ends. "Protect and Serve" does not include them. Although the numbers of Black women who have been murdered at the hands of the police are not as high as Black men, it is clear that Black women are not safe, let alone protected, in the hands of law enforcement.*

In addition, the data showed that when Black women called 911 for assistance with emotionally disturbed or abusive/threatening sons/grandsons/brothers/fathers/husbands/significant others, rather than provide appropriate assistance, the cops killed the man. Some 25% of the total number of incidents where Black people were killed by police started with such calls.[16]

In an interview about the report, when I urged KPFA's listeners not

16 http://www.operationghettostorm.org/uploads/1/9/1/1/19110795/new_all_14_11_04.pdf pp. 18, 22, 23. Although the data in the report is more than a decade old. Police violence against Black people persists and grows. For a detailed discussion to explain the persistence of state violence, even after the various uprisings against it, go to http://www.operationghettostorm.org/news or to www.ArleneEisen.org.

to rely on the police, Kate Raphael, the show's host, pressed the question: what is a woman whose partner is a clear and present threat to her life supposed to do?[17] Given the lack of community organizations then, in 2013, and now, there may be no choice but to call 911. It remains a serious weakness of the anti-imperialist movement that people in oppressed communities still must depend for "rescue" on the same imperial state that re-enforces white supremacy and patriarchy.

The problem is still massive and growing, with more than 16 million people in the US enduring intimate partner abuse each year.[18] Gendered violence endures, in part, because only bourgeois feminists and other reformers have addressed it with "solutions" that have been exclusively based on providing individual services to the "victims," and punitive interventions against the perpetrators. Without collectively challenging the structural and systemic roots of gendered violence, "domestic violence agencies" invariably add to the power and budgets of the very institutions that perpetuate the inequality and violence of the status quo.[19]

Nevertheless, there have been scattered attempts to mobilize and organize women collectively to prevent and protect ourselves from gendered violence without relying on or legitimizing state violence. For example, Sisters on Liberated Ground in Brooklyn and the Dorchester Green Light Program were models of community mobilization that prevented violence against women without state intervention.[20] However, so much more is needed. If we are ever to build anti-imperialist organizations capable of surviving and eventually defeating the vicious matrix of imperialism, white supremacy and patriarchy, our organizations must incorporate gendered violence prevention into their programs of action.

Today we face the imminence of climate catastrophe; a world beset

17 https://archives.kpfa.org/data/20130415-Mon1300.mp3 (the interview is in the 1st half of the recording)

18 https://www.breakthecycle.org/domestic-violence-statistics/

19 Rebecca J. Hall, "Feminist Strategies to End Violence Against Women," in *The Oxford Handbook of Transnational Feminist Movements*, ed. Rawwida Baksh and Wendy Harcourt (Oxford University Press, 2015), 394.

20 For more details on these and other initiatives: https://www.womenandprison.org/violence/where_abolition_meets_action and the KPFA radio interview cited previously.

by genocide, perpetual war and chaos due to the desperation of imperialism to save itself from inevitable doom; the grotesque resurgence of unabashed and unmasked white supremacy in the form of mass deportations and witch hunts against "DEI beneficiaries"; and the reassertion of naked patriarchal authority in the form of forced breeding, fanatical enforcement of rigid gender differences, transphobia, dismantling the last vestiges of social safety nets and more. With their very survival at risk, a number of Black and other internally colonized communities and other anti-imperialist projects have promoted community-based mutual aid and self-defense strategies. Those that incorporate programs to prevent and defend against gendered violence will better serve and strengthen their communities and broaden their base.

In the midst of the U.S/Zionist Holocaust against Gaza, Palestinian researcher, Walaa Alqaisiya, published an article entitled, "The Urgency of Anti-Imperialist Feminism."[21] She demonstrated how the vicious Zionist white supremacist lie that Palestinians are "human animals," intermeshed with the patriarchal lie that "Hamas is a rapist machine," galvanize support, even impunity, for genocide. In recent years, as liberal feminism or bourgeois feminism, rails against "rape culture" and gendered violence without considering their systemic roots and relationships, they provide fertile soil for the spreading and deepening "consent" for genocide. The world has become too dangerous to cede any more anti-imperialist feminist ground to either bourgeois feminists, Zionists, imperialists, white supremacists, Christian nationalists, Techno-fascists or oppressors of any sort.

From Past Generations of the Worldwide family of Militant Women to Yours

I have called my teachers "the worldwide family of militant women"—Bùi Thị Mè's name for members of anti-imperialist women's organizations and movements. They certainly were not my only teachers, but their experiences and theories pointed me directly to strategies, tactics, organizations that welcomed and encouraged me to put theory into practice.

21 https://www.radicalphilosophy.com/article/the-urgency-of-anti-imperialist-feminism

My editors at Iskra Books, Róisín Dubh, David Peat, and Henry Hakamäki, asked that in this epilogue I address the question that flows from this learning: "What advice do you have for upcoming generations of activists?" At the foundation, by conjuring an image of an anti-imperialist family of militant women, I have aimed to encourage readers to defy our indoctrination in toxic individualism that only serves our imperialist rulers. Seek advice, join with others. Here I will occasionally quote some of my favorite members of the family to help answer Róisín, David, and Henry's question.

In the 1960s we called ourselves "The New Left" because we thought we had little to learn from the "Old Left," that is the Communist Party who we dismissed as revisionist and reformist. We were largely wrong about that, and many other issues. I am still too often surprised to discover how "unprecedented problems" not only have precedents, those precedents also may point the way to useful strategies, even solutions.

Therefore, my *first* piece of advice is try to learn from history, both the history of the enemy and the history of revolution, from our successes and our failures. It is not necessary to re-invent every wheel. At the same time, we need to understand that history, by definition, involves change. Systems of oppression, especially patriarchy, have long histories. Likewise, they do not exist outside of history. In other words, the patriarchy that arose with the dawn of the concept of private property is not the same patriarchy that is enmeshed with imperialism today. The patriarchy that is enmeshed with white supremacy in the myths of protecting "white womanhood" is different from the patriarchy enmeshed with Confucian feudal conquest of Viet Nam that imposed polygamy. At a 1975 Conference of Socialist Feminists, Barbara Ehrenreich emphasized, "there is a difference between a patriarchy that practices female infanticide and patriarchy in a socialist society in which women are under-represented on the central committee of the ruling party; and the difference is worth dying for."[22]

Second: Always keep in mind our main enemy: today, and for the foreseeable future, that is the US system of imperialism. Keep the enemy in sight when we design strategies, tactics, organizations, programs,

22 Barbara Ehrenreich quoted by Arlene Eisen in *Women and Revolution in Viet Nam* (London: 1984), 278-9. Available as PDF at www.ArleneEisen.org.

projects, and messages. For example, the holocaust against the Palestinian people is fundamentally the result of the Zionist Project sponsored by British imperialism first, then US imperialism regardless of which administration is representing the parties involved, the psychology of the perpetrators or opinion polls. While the struggle against imperialism is priority, we sabotage our struggles by allowing that priority to blind us to the ways imperialism requires white supremacy and patriarchy, especially inside the imperial core. These structures of oppression are mutually re-enforcing. Revolutionary organizations that challenge white supremacy and patriarchy may also re-enforce strengthen their struggles against imperialism. On the other hand, reformism is a distraction, a dead end embraced by those who have given up on defeating imperialism.

Identifying imperialism as the main enemy or contradiction is the foundation for the concept of Black women's "triple oppression." Nearly a century ago, Louise Thompson first used the term "triple exploitation" to describe Black women's oppression. Then, in 1949, Claudia Jones wrote several articles that argued that the triple oppression of Black women was shaped by the imperial system. She concluded therefore, "*the status of Negro women is a barometer of the status of all women, and that the fight for the full, economic, political and social equality of the Negro woman is in the vital self-interest of white workers, in the vital interest of the fight to realize equality for all women.*"[23]

In the following decades, many anti-imperialist women and organizations have adapted and updated these ideas: the Third World Women's Alliance, Kathleen Cleaver, Assata Shakur, other women in the Black Panther Party and to name a few.[24] We also have the rich internation-

23 Louise Thompson first urged the Communist Party to recognize "Negro women's triple exploitation" in 1936 in "Toward a Brighter Dawn," reprinted in *Organize Fight Win, Black Communist Women's Political Writing* edited by Charisse Burden-Stelly and Jodie Dean, (Verso, 2022), 70-73. Claudia Jones, the leading post-World War II theoretician and member of the Central Committee of the CPUSA was a prolific writer. Writings by and about her are readily available on the internet. This quote comes from, https://viewpointmag.com/2015/02/21/we-seek-full-equality-for-women/

24 For more on Third World Women's Alliance: Patricia Romney. *We Were There. The Third World Women's Alliance and the Second Wave* (Feminist Press, 2021). Most of Kathleen Cleaver's speeches are scattered on the internet and are also in KPFA's Archive. Many of Assata Shakur's interviews are digitized at Freedom Archives and her website. Her autobiography was first published in London by Zed in 1987. More

al experience of women fighting for emancipation in the course of their joining national liberation struggles against imperialism in Asia, Africa and Latin America.

In 1977, the Combahee River Collective Statement, in the tradition of preceding anti-imperialist women re-asserted, "If Black women were free, it would mean that everyone else would have to be free since our freedom would necessitate the destruction of all the systems of oppression." One of the many important implications of this analysis is that all oppressed women, including many white women, have an objective stake in the liberation of Black, Palestinian and all other colonized women. That is, solidarity with the most oppressed women is not primarily a moral duty undertaken by well-meaning, charitable "allies." Rather it is a strategic imperative essential for all our liberation.

Third: To be prepared for our protracted struggle we need to take care of ourselves, educate, organize, mobilize, and build towards revolution. We need millions more people to join us. We need community. In order to survive our long struggle, we should practice loving self-criticism, recognize the difference between personal, even ego-driven needs, and collective needs. There must be a ban on all gaslighting or personal attacks among comrades and, of course, violent abuse. We should practice honesty, forgiveness, apologies, generosity, and gratitude to build revolutionary families and communities. As Assata Shakur advised, *"People are expected to live in this world of alienation and fear. I hear that in the States people are even afraid to make eye contact in the streets. No social change can happen if people are that isolated. So we need to rebuild a sense of community that means knocking on doors and reconnecting."*[25]

Fourth: The struggle is not a career or a past time. It is a lifelong, full-time commitment to join with humanity to rescue humanity from the threat of annihilation. Challenge the "NGOization of the movement." Commit to the "Struggle" not simply to the "Work." Embrace the iden-

interviews and conversations with Assata Shakur, Kathleen Cleaver and others are in Thandisizwe Chimurenga edited collection, *Some of Us Are Brave*. (Daraja Press, 2023, 2024). The Combahee River Collective Statement is at: https://www.lgbtqhistory.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Combahee_River_Collective_Statement.pdf

25 http://freedomarchives.org/Documents/Finder/DOC513_scans/Assata_Shakur/513.Assata.TheInterview.May.2003.pdf

tity of "revolutionary," "cadre," and "militant." (Although for security, in public, you may call yourself an organizer or activist.) In 2004, INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence sounded the alarm against the ravages of the "non-profit industrial complex" with a collection of essays documenting how "The Revolution will not be Funded."[26] In 2014, at a meeting of the World Social Forum, Arundhati Roy sounded a louder alarm about how NGOs depoliticize the resistance of both their staff and their clients.[27] Unfortunately, their warnings have been largely ignored. As the neo-liberal era that spawned the "non-profit industrial complex" is replaced by the openly kleptocratic rule of billionaires with no pretense of a social conscience, anti-imperialists will have no choice but to embed ourselves in community and revolutionary organizing for survival.

Fifth: As the struggles of the people of the world weaken imperialism, the enemy becomes more desperate, dangerous, fascist. Again, we must plan for protracted struggle. Avoid fear, defeatism or paralysis with collective planning and solidarity. Organize as if our lives depend on it. We need disciplined organization based in a shared political vision. There is much we can learn from the experiences of the Viet Nam Women's Union[28] and other organizations forged in national liberation struggles.

Sixth: Always, and especially when the enemy's power overwhelms, remember that their narrative of omnipotence and impunity reinforces their power. Yet, in other time zones of the world, especially in Asia, Africa and Latin America, people fighting for liberation have won and will continue to win. An internationalist perspective and solidarity is essential to maintaining the protracted struggle that will eventually defeat imperialism. Assata Shakur underlined this point in an interview more than 20 years ago. *"The people in the US have to struggle against a system of organized lies....I had no idea how ignorant I was until I came to Cuba.*

26 INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence, *The Revolution will not be Funded* (Duke University Press, 2004).

27 https://towardfreedom.org/story/archives/globalism/arundhati-roy-the-ngo-ization-of-resistance/

28 In my second book on Vietnamese women, there's a chapter on the Viet Nam Women's Union. *Women and Revolution in Viet Nam* (ZED Press, 1984), 119-137. Also available in PDF at www.ArleneEisen.org.

I had no knowledge of authors, filmmakers, and artists outside of America. We believe we're free but we're not. Our world vision is tainted."[29]

Last, I wish you all find loving comrades and nurture your worldwide families of militants and may these lines below from the brilliant June Jordan continue to inspire you.

"Moving Towards Home"

"*I was born a Black woman*
And now
I am become a Palestinian
Against the relentless laughter of evil
There is less and less living room
And where are my loved ones?
It is time to make our way home.[30]

In struggle and solidarity,
Arlene Eisen
March 8, 2025

29 https://www.finalcall.com/artman/publish/Perspectives_1/article_8683.shtml

30 June Jordan, "Moving Towards Home," *Directed by Desire, The Collected Poems of June Jordan* (Cooper Canyon Press, 2005), 398-400. This is the closing stanza of a poem June Jordan first published in the *New York Times* in 1982. It began with a scene of an Israeli bulldozer covering the arms and legs of Palestinian refugees who they had killed in Lebanon. Each line of Jordan's poem might have been written in response to the US/Zionist holocaust in Gaza and West Bank today.

SAN FRANCISCO, California, December 1985. Vicki Garvin, former Communist Party cadre, co-founder of National Negro Labor Council, editor of FREEDOM, who remained active in Black Liberation struggles after she returned from exile in Ghana and China, celebrates Kwanzaa in Arlene's home with Biko and Tongo.

SAN FRANCISCO, California, October 2001. Kathleen Cleaver and Arlene visiting in Arlene's living room.

JAYOUS, Occupied Palestine (West Bank), November 2004. In solidarity with Palestine liberation, Arlene, like many internationals, joined in the olive harvest not only to pick olives, but also to act as human shields against settler attacks.

NEW ORLEANS, Louisiana, August 2006. Peoples' Hurricane Relief organized "Hands-around-the-Dome"a year after the great Katrina Great Flood, to commemorate the 5-day ordeal of survivors of Hurricane Katrina and to demand their "right of return". Pictured from right to left: Tongo Eisen-Martin, Lybon Tyani Mabasa (South Africa), Arlene, Malcolm Suber, Kali Akuno, Edinice (Brazil).

CARACAS, Venezuela. July 5, 2014. Arlene attends Annual Celebration of Venezuela's Independence Day to cover the parade for Venezuelanalysis.com. She is in the reviewing stands with her comrade, Eudis Borra, award-winning Venezuelan documentary film maker for Catia TV.

SAN FRANCISCO, California. December 2015. Arlene, Biko and Tongo protesting the police murder of Mario Woods, a young Black man.

LOS ANGELES, California. April 2016. Arlene speaking about the Report *Operation Ghetto Storm*, analyzing the police war on Black people at a Black Lives Matter Fundraising event.

Recommended Reading and Resources

Anti-Imperialist Women's Issues and Movement

Abdo, Nahla. *Captive Revolution: Oral histories of women Palestinian political prisoners*. Pluto Press, 2014.

Bambara, Toni Cade. *The Black Woman Anthology*. Signet, 1970.

Block, Diana. *Arm the Spirit: A Women's Journey Underground and Back*. AK Press, 2009.

Bukhari, Safiya. *The War Before: The True Story of Becoming a Black Panther, Keeping the Faith in Prison, and Fighting for Those Left Behind*. Feminist Press, 2010.

Burden-Stelly, Charisse and Jodi Dean. *Organize Fight Win: Black Communist Women's Political Writing*. Verso, 2022. (Includes writings by Vicki Garvin, Claudia Jones, Louise Thompson, Lorraine Hansberry, Eslanda Goode Robeson, and others)

Burgin, SN. "White Women, Anti-Imperialist Feminism and the Story of Race within the US Women's Liberation Movement." *Women's History Review* 25, no. 5 (2016): 756-770.

Chimurgenga, Thandisizwe. *Some of Us Are Brave: Interviews and Conversations with Sistas on Life, Art, and Struggle*." Daraja Press, volume 1 2023, volume 2 2024.

Cleaver, Kathleen. "Back to Africa, The Evolution of the International Section of the Black Panther Party." In *The Black Panther Party Reconsidered*, edited by Charles E. Jones. Black Classic Press, 2009.

Cleaver, Kathleen. "Women, Power and Revolution." *History is a Weapon*. 1998. https://www.historyisaweapon.com/defcon1/cleaverwomenpowerrev.html

Davies, Carole Boyce. *Left of Karl Marx: The Political Life of Claudia Jones*. Duke University Press, 2007.

Dinh, Nguyen Thi. *No Other Road to Take: Memoir*. Translated by Mai V. Elliott. Cornell University Southeast Asia Program, 1976.

Dunbar Ortiz, Roxanne. *Outlaw Woman: A Memoir of the War Years, 1960-1975*. City Lights, 2001.

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Eisen, Arlene. *Women and Revolution in Viet Nam*. ZED Books, 1984. Available as PDF at www.ArleneEisen.org.

Eisen, Arlene. *From Women in Prison Here to Women of Viet Nam: We Are Sisters*. Peoples Press, 1975. (Collection of letters from women incarcerated at Frontera, California to women in Viet Nam and response from Viet Nam Women's Union. Available at http://www.freedomarchives.org/Documents/Finder/DOC57scans/57.Vietnam.FromWomenToWomen.pdf)

Estrada, Ulises. *Tania: Undercover with Che Guevara in Bolivia*. Ocean Press, 2005. The most authoritative biography of Tamara Bunke, written by the Cuban official who helped organize Che's campaigns in both Congo and Bolivia and who trained Bunke for undercover struggle in Bolivia.

Garvin, Vicki. https://archives.nypl.org/scl/186663 (Extensive archive of speeches and lectures given and collected by Garvin at Schomberg Center for Research, 515 Malcolm X Blvd, NYC)

Garvin, Vicki. https://archives.nypl.org/scm/21011 (Extensive archive of writings and papers by Garvin at Schomberg Center for Research, 515 Malcolm X Blvd, NYC)

Garvin, Vicki. https://freedomarchives.org/Documents/Finder/DOC513_scans/Vicki_Garvin/513.VickiGarvin.RedStarOverChina.pdf (Freedom Archives also has tapes of recordings of interviews with Garvin by Lincoln Bergman, her former son-in-law. They are not digitized.)

Gore, Dayo, Jeanne Theoharis, and Komozi Woodard. *Want to Start a Revolution? Radical Women in the Black Freedom Struggle*. NYU Press, 2009. (Includes chapters on Shirley Graham DuBois, Vicki Garvin, Assata Shakur, Ericka Huggins, Denise Oliver, Yuri Kochiyama, and Johnnie Tillmon)

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James, Joy. "Framing the Panther, Assata Shakur and Black Female Agency." In *Women in the Black Revolt*, edited by Jeanne Theo Harris and Komozi Woodard. NYU Press, 2009.

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Jones, Claudia. "An End to the Neglect of the Problems of the Negro Women." *Political Affairs* 28, no. 6 (1949): 51-67.

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Lindsey, Lydia. "Red Monday: The Silencing of Claudia Jones in 20th Century Feminist Revolutionary Thought." *The Journal of Intersectionality* 3, no. 1 (2019): 10-20. (This issue is entirely devoted to writings about Claudia Jones, Guest editor: Charisse Burden-Stelly)

Lynn, Denise. "Women Crusade for Peace: Claudia Jones and the Cold War Peace Movement." *The Journal of Intersectionality* 3, no. 1 (2019): 67-81. (Details Claudia Jones' "gendered internationalism" or anti-imperialism)

Moraga, Cherríe L. and Gloria E. Anzaldúa. *This Bridge Called My Back*. Berkeley: Women of Color Series Third Woman Press, 2001. In her 2001 Forward, Moraga emphasizes that Third World Women have needed to resist imperialism—in its colonial forms of invasion, terrorism, and war—for 500 years. Third World Women's issues include: immigrant rights, indigenous peoples' water and land rights, prison industrial system, reproductive rights, global economic terrorism, homophobic violence, and sovereignty. In her Foreword, Toni Cade remarks: "this book needs no foreword, it's the afterword that'll count"—the coalitions of women determined to be dangerous to our enemies... the work "*to make revolution irresistible*."

Morales, Iris. *Through the Eyes of Rebel Women: The Young Lords, 1969-76*. Sugarcane Press, 2016.

Perry, Imani. *Looking for Lorraine*. Beacon Press, 2018.

Prasad, Archana. "Women's Liberation and the Agrarian Question: Insights from Peasant Movements in India." *Agrarian South: Journal of Political Economy* 10, no. 1 (2021), 15-40.

Randall, Margaret. *Haydée Santamaria: Cuban Revolutionary*. Duke University Press, 2015.

Ransby, Barbara. *Ella Baker and The Black Freedom Movement*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003.

Ransby, Barbara. *Eslanda: The Large Unconventional Life of Mrs. Robeson*. Haymarket Books, 2022.

Rojas, Marta. *Tania: The Unforgettable Guerrilla*. Random House,

1971. (This book, published by leading corporate publisher serves as testimony to the popularity of Che Guevara during that historic era. The book was more a scrapbook than a biography.)

Romney, Patricia. *We Were There: The Third World Women's Alliance and the Second Wave*. Feminist Press, 2021.

Rosenberg, Susan. *An American Radical: A Political Prisoner in My Own Country*. Citadel Press, 2011.

Modongal, Shameer, and Ashly K Ramachandran. "Steadfast and Strong: Chronicles of Palestinian Women's Resistance." *Economic and Political Weekly (Engage)* 59, no. 48, (2024).

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Shakur, Assata. "Interview with Assata." In *Some of Us Are Brave, Vol 2*, edited by Thandisizwe Chimurenga. Daraja Press, 2024. (Additional interviews and articles by and about Assata Shakur are at available at: https://search.freedomarchives.org/search.php?s=Assata+Shakur and http://assatashakur.org)

Thompson, Becky. "Multiracial Feminism, Recasting the Chronology of Second Wave Feminism." *Feminist Studies* 28, no. 4 (2002): 337-350. She quotes Angela Davis, "I resent that the legacy (anti-imperialist) I consider my own—one that I also helped to construct, has been rendered invisible." (p. 350) And cites examples of white women like Naomi Jaffe, who believed that solidarity with the Attica Rebellion was a feminist issue.

Political Economy of Women's Oppression under Imperialism

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Cheng, Han. "Women, Domestic Labor and Economic Imperialism."

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Cohen, J., and Y. van der Meulen Rodgers. "The feminist political economy of Covid-19: Capitalism, women, and work." *Global Public Health* 16, no. 8-9 (2021): 1381-1395.

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Federici, Silvia. *Caliban and the Witch, Women, The Body and Primitive Accumulation*. London: Penguin (2021, orig 2004). Federici, along with Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James co-founded the international women's organization that launched the concept and activist political campaign for "wages for housework". Over the last half century, Federici theorized on how women's unwaged labor in reproducing new generations of workers is the original and most important form of capital accumulation, essential to the development and survival of capitalism. Her theorizing on social reproduction continues to influence generations of scholars and activists. Her prolific writing and public presentations are easily found on the internet.

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Johnston, Melissa. "The Political Economy of Patriarchal Accumulation". *Review of International Political Economy*, online 6/4/2024 https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09692290.2025.2513381#d1e134 Johnston's theory is weakened by her failure to recognize the dialectical relationship between capitalist and patriarchal accumulation.

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Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1967. (At the time he was First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Viet Nam Workers' Party he gave this talk at a national conference of women activists, Feb 1959. pp.116-122.)

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Ossome, Lyn. "Imperialism and Crises of Social Reproduction in Africa." *Review of African Political Economy* 51, no. 181 (2024): 515-530.

Scott, Catherine. "The gender of dependency theory: women as workers, from neocolonialism in West Africa to the implosion of contemporary capitalism". *Review of African Political Economy*. 2021. Vol. 48(167):66-81. DOI: 10.1080/03056244.2021.1882415 https://www.scienceopen.com/hosted-document?-doi=10.1080/03056244.2021.1882415 Scott critically reviews Samir Amin's work through the lens of Marxist social reproduction theory and anti-imperialist feminism and suggests ways more attention to women's emancipation would contribute to socialist revolution.

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York's Prison Guard Strike." *Inquest*. https://inquest.org/the-hidden-war-fueling-the-new-york-prison-guard-strike/. (Updated details on gendered violence in prisons, 50% of sexual assaults perpetrated by guards.)

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Reproductive Justice

Sister Song: Women of Color Reproductive Justice Collective, *Involuntary Sterilizations Continue: Response to Irwin County Detention Center Allegations (Amenable)*. 2021. https://www.sistersong.net/e-book-involuntary-sterilizations-continue

https://reprojusticecolumbia.org/guides/reading-list (includes readings on: reproductive justice theory and framework, abolition and criminalization, birth justice, social reproduction theory, queer and trans reproductive rights, sterilization, disability rights, over-medicalization of birth)

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(Note: The second Trump administration is committed to implementing "Project 2025", the agenda published by the Heritage Foundation, reflecting the interests Christian Nationalists and Dominionists, white supremacists and other far-right factions. The Project 2025 Agenda directly challenges reproductive justice. Since the MAGA movement emerged during Trumps first campaign, it attracted Christian Evangelicals and prompted a cottage industry of critical publications. For example, Du Mez, Kirstin. *Jesus and John Wayne*. 2020.)

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The "Era of Malcolm X, Che Guevara and Ho Chi Minh" (1960s-1970s)

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Malcolm X

This bibliography includes a comprehensive list of his speeches and writings, as well as works about him through 1985.To date, https://archive.org/details/malcolmxcomprehe0000john
Abdul Akilimat, Pioneering Black scholar, led the organization of a conference in 1990, attended by 3000 people, to discuss Malcolm X's "legacy of struggle". In 24 sessions spread over four days, panelists led discussions of every aspect of Malcolm X's teachings and practice. They included close comrades of Malcolm, those who studied him and those who were committed to putting his teachings into practice. Eg. Vicki Garvin, Alice Windom, Yuri Kochiyama, Nelson Peery, Dhoruba bin Wahad, and Ahmed Obafemi. Here is the link to the Conference program, including study guides for each session. https://alkalimat.org/brothermalcolm/1990_conf_contents.htm

McDuffie, Eric S. and Komozi Woodard. "If You're in a Country That's Progressive, the Woman Is Progressive: Black Women Radicals and the Making of the Politics and Legacy of Malcolm X." *Biography* 36, no. 3 (2013): 507-539. Features Queen Mother Moore, Vicki Garvin, and others.

Black and Other Movements of 1960s-1970s

Comprehensive source for all information, testimony, analysis of the

Southern-based movement from which the Black Power Movement emerged. Includes a section on SNCC's internationalism and also a comprehensive bibliography. https://snccdigital.org

Official website maintained by the Black Panther Party through the 50th Anniversary of its founding in 2016. http://itsabouttimebpp.com/home/home.html

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In 1978, three guards were killed at Pontiac State Penitentiary in Illinois, about 100 miles south of Chicago. Ten Black men were charged, in the largest mass death penalty case since the Scottsboro boys. A Coalition put the horrific prison conditions on trial and campaigned for the release of those charged. https://search.freedomarchives.org/search.php?view_collection=195

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About Arlene Eisen

Inspired by the Black and Vietnamese liberation movements, Arlene has been a militant in the struggle against imperialism since the 1960s—first as a protester facing tear gas and later as a teacher and writer. She edited *The Movement* newspaper, and was a leading voice in the anti-imperialist women's movement of the 1970s. For the next half century, she joined the anti-apartheid movement, the movement for justice in Palestine, including the olive harvest in the West Bank, the struggle for the right to return to New Orleans after Katrina, the movements against fascist US police and their deputized militias, and against the holocaust in Gaza—always standing in solidarity with national liberation struggles both inside and outside the US Empire.

To support herself and her two sons, she worked as a sociology and women's studies lecturer, machinist, journalist and public health expert. During the first ten years of her children's lives, she was on welfare.

Arlene Eisen is the author of the influential study, *Operation Ghetto* Storm, first published by the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement. Along with a foreword by Kali Akuno, their analysis of the US war on Black people documented, for the first time, that US police and their surrogates kill a Black person every 28 hours. From Chicago to Oakland, from New York to New Orleans, the hashtag *#Every28Hours* fueled campaigns that challenged police power. The US Human Rights Network in Geneva presented the report at the 2014 Review of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

She also wrote, *Women of Viet Nam* (Revised), 1975, based on her stay in Viet Nam with the Viet Nam Women's Union. That book so resonated with popular concerns, that even with no commercial advertising, or social media, it sold more than 50,000 copies in English and editions in Spanish, French, Danish and Farsi were published. In 1981, she returned to Viet Nam to learn how the process of women's liberation had progressed during peacetime. *Women and Revolution in Viet Nam*, 1984, became the first book published in the West to explore the relationship between women's liberation and building socialism in Viet Nam.

Eisen's journalism has appeared in *Telesur, The Root, Counterpunch, San Francisco Bayview,* including on "Zionist Sabotage of UN Anti-Racist Efforts", *Pambazuka, Washington Post,* and others. For three years, she produced and hosted *Nina Viva,* a monthly radio show on KPOO-FM that featured voices of women against Empire, including for example, "Interviews with the Palestinian Feminist Collective." Based in Caracas, she was a staff writer for *Venezuelanalysis.com,* an independent English-language daily news service.

Her latest book, *In The Worldwide Family of Militant Women*, is a hybrid social history-memoir that spans the two decades from 1962 to 1982.

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"***In the Worldwide Family of Militant Women*** is in the company of political memoirs like ***The Wall Between***, ***Assata***, and ***Outlaw Woman*** in not only teaching us how to fight, but inspiring us to do so. Organizers and activists, students and workers, each have something to learn from Arlene Eisen's ideological development, internationalist perspective, steadfast commitment to building the women's liberation and anti-war movements, and fightback against a capitalist racist patriarchal society. This is the political education and radical motivation we sorely need as the choice between socialism and barbarism becomes more acute."

—**Charisse Burden-Stelly,** author of ***Black Scare/Red Scare: Theorizing Capitalist Racism in the United States***

"Arlene Eisen's earlier work, ***Women of Viet Nam***, remains, so many years later, one of my favorite books depicting the ways women's resistance affects the outcome of a struggle for justice. It is both a history and an analysis of how promoting women's full leadership and participation can determine the success of an entire social system..." (*continued inside)*

—**Laura Whitehorn**, former US-held political prisoner, co-founder of Release Aging People in Prison (RAPP Campaign), editor of ***The War Before*** by Safiya Bukhari

"Do yourself a favor, get a copy of ***In the Worldwide Family of Militant Women***. The historical lessons conveyed in this work are as relevant to movement-building today as they were in the 1960s and '70s... Arlene imparted many of these lessons to me, and many others, in our joint work in New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina. And then again, in even more depth, in developing ***Operation Ghetto Storm***..." (*continued inside*)

—**Kali Akuno,** Executive Director and Co-Founder of Cooperation Jackson, co-editor of ***Jackson Rising Redux***

Connecting the frontlines of history with the urgent struggles of today, Arlene Eisen's memoir/social history charts a personal and collective radical journey of the 1960s through the early 1980s. ***In The Worldwide Family of Militant Women*** is a riveting account of these turbulent decades—from the mountains of Peru and the jungles of Viet Nam to the revolutionary projects of Cuba, China, the USSR, and back to struggles inside the US.

Eisen demonstrates how she, and thousands of other women, had the opportunity to learn in a time of historic upheaval when revolutionary movements were on the rise in every continent. They joined those struggles both as rank and file and as leaders, in their own organizations and in national organizations; for their own survival and liberation as well as for the liberation of their nations.

As the US once again wages genocidal war against a poorer nation, Eisen's hard-won lessons resonate loudly. Her story is a call to action for a new generation, outraged by imperial impunity and searching for a path of meaningful resistance. For anyone compelled to challenge the same intolerable war machine, this book offers indispensable wisdom, profound hope, and the proof that we do not fight alone.

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Arlene Eisen is the author of *Operation Ghetto Storm*, *Women and Revolution in Viet Nam*, and *Women of Viet Nam (Revised)*.

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